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MISS STANDISH;

AND

BY THE BAY OF NAPLES.

By A. E. N. BEWICKE,

AUTHOR OF 'MARGERY TRAVERS;' 'ONWARDS! BUT WHITHER?' ETC., ETC.

'Beseech your majesty.
Forbear sharp speeches to her: She's a lady,
So tender of rebukes, that words are strokes,
And strokes death to her.'—SHAKESPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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BY THE BAY OF NAPLES

(CONTINUED).

CHAPTER VII.

'FROM AUSTRALIA,' SAID SIR IVOR.

'Grim-hearted world, that lookst with Levite eyes,
On those poor fallen by too much faith in man.'

Lowell.

EVA, a mother among a brood of rosy children; Howard, a man of weight at British Associations, and such like, they often looked back to it in the after years; remembered

how Lady Cecil and Mr St Germains had talked, the latter making many a kindly reference to the younger man, so as to draw him out on the score of his fresher acquaintance with the classics, although it was evident his own classical lore required no brushing up. They recalled his kindly, pleasant anecdotes with their little philosophical tags for the special edification of Eva; and how once he had wandered away from those old classical times, and told the story of his own youth, how he had first seen Mrs St Germains, and how impossible it had seemed he should ever win her. Then how they had gathered violets at Pœstum under the shadow of the golden temples, and boy and girl-like had plighted their

troth without one thought as to their future income. How, on their return to Naples, he had found the letter offering him the rich living he had held ever since.

'So then we married, and settled down, and this is the first time we have left England since then,' said the Rector.

'Dear! dear! I wonder how old Betty Martin is getting on. And whether Jones remembers to latch the churchyard gate.'

On this Lady Cecil had said it was a shame he and Mrs St Germains were separated, and they must certainly drive back together, saying so with more feeling than she generally displayed, her eyes softening with recollections of Lord

Cecil, their courting, and their parting through his early death. And whilst Eva passed her arm round her mother, and nearly knocked her hat off kissing her, Howard remembered how just then he had caught sight of Dulcie in the carriage following after them, Dulcie very still and white with her hands lightly folded and her head drooped, as in a dream, driving she knew not whither. It was not the young people who talked even in this carriage.

Little Eva's heart was full of pity for Sir Ivor, and as to Howard, he was thinking passionately how to free that sweet, pale girl, who he knew trusted him, but whom he felt so powerless to help, in spite of all mathematics, pure and

mixed, with which his head was full. For was he not only a young fellow, not good looking, and very insufficiently supplied with this world's lucre?

He wore a humbled expression such as Cambridge did not know; the muscles of his mouth relaxed, and it would have been easily possible to detect a moisture in his eyes.

Then the road took another turn, and as the carriages once more swayed past it, he caught a sight of Sir Ivor Montague, with his arms folded, and his soft dark hat crushed down almost over his eyes,—a Baronet with untold wealth, as they all knew, and as they all did not know innocently happy for the first time for the last eighteen years. The sight of

him made the colour flush to Howard Jephson's brow. He set his mouth with an expression Cambridge knew well enough; he had made up his mind the thing should be done. But the young man, to whom life still presented itself under the aspect of a theorem, everything cut and dry, the quantities all determinate, with causes logically working out their previously ascertained scientific results, little knew what to him ridiculously unnatural combinations and melodramatic coincidences were nearing round him to bring about what he was setting himself to do; at the same time accomplishing it, and making it all purposeless as far as he himself was concerned, and as he fully recognised in the after years,

even a thing not to be wished for, for himself.

The carriage stopped, and they all got out. Three children, with heavy though tattered cloaks drawn well over their heads, and round their shrunken limbs, yet shivering in spite of all their wrappings, despite also the burning sunshine, came and begged. Their faces were of a green yellow, and it would be hard anywhere to see children who looked more complete pictures of misery, disinherited of all life and joy. In a perfectly unprincipled manner, and without any reference to modern philanthropic ideas, each of the party pressed a few coins of little value into the suffering children's hands.

'Pœstum is supposed to have been built by a colony of Sybarites, is it not?' said Lady Cecil, in suave tones, passing on with a murmur of Sybaris and Croton all mixed.

Somehow Howard and Eva lingered behind with the children. Eva's cheeks were very red, and her eyes full of tears. She gave each of the children an individual pat of friendliness over and above the already given coins, then left them as with difficulty.

'You can't help them,' said Howard, who had remained behind with an apparently equally vague purpose. 'All the people here die of fever. They have to be continually shifting the guards. Come, Eva.'

Eva came.

'I don't think people should be allowed to live here,—not if it is so unhealthy,' she said, and passed her arm through Dulcie's.

'Should you mind dying so very much?' asked Dulcie, looking round at her, with an expression of some surprise.

'Oh! I? No; I don't know. But other people, that's so different,' said Eva. 'I don't like other people to suffer.'

'Don't you?' said Sir Ivor. 'I can conceive no higher pleasure — except making them happy,' and he drew near to Dulcie. Dulcie shuddered.

Eva looked up too much astonished to say, or even to feel, anything besides

surprise. In all her philosophy of life this was undreamt of.

Howard Jephson took hold of his walking-stick as if it were a weapon of offence. But what was to be done? The two girls had hold of one another's arms, and he could not slay Sir Ivor there and then because he had uttered an immoral sentiment. Liberty of speech is allowed to every one in these days.

But after luncheon came his opportunity. The elder people were satisfied with walking about, after they had wandered round the three temples, told each other the height and circumference of the pillars, discussed the question of capitals, etc. The horses, however, were not yet satisfied with their rest; and then

appeared Dulcie's lately-aroused interest in antiquities.

Without saying anything to any one, she set off to walk round the walls alone. Howard had been helping his aunt; Eva was tying up bunches of violets; Sir Ivor lying on the grass in an attitude usual to him, his hat tilted over his eyes, dreaming as it appeared. Never had Lady Cecil seemed so tiresomely *exigeante* to her nephew. However, at last, he was free to follow after Dulcie. He found her in a deserted gateway.

'See!' she said, as he came up, 'these steps are worn away by the feet of hundreds and thousands of people, whom no one knows anything about. Do you think they wondered as we wonder?'

[illegible] wonder. Miss [illegible] remains?

[illegible] looked [illegible] surprised. It was [illegible] guardian, but she should hear [illegible] name until it had been settled whether [illegible] was true, and she really had [illegible] right [illegible] wealthy Austra- [illegible] whose daughter she was said to be. [illegible] must [illegible] having borne the [illegible] name [illegible] Jones in the work- [illegible] with [illegible] John [illegible] For so few [illegible] who [illegible] could be [illegible] anything [illegible] Jones, that she was still all [illegible] in the [illegible] sounding name, of which she had a respectful [illegible]

"Is it [illegible]," said she, after a few moments' pause, leaning against the an- cient wall, and holding a bunch of purple

violets up to her face. 'We live, and all we know is that we have to die.'

'That is true,' said the Cambridge undergraduate. 'But as that is a fact we can't alter. I do not see the use of thinking much about it.'

'Do not you?' said Dulcie, looking up at him deferentially. Then speaking very slowly, 'I think of nothing else. It seems to me,' she added hesitatingly, 'that I never wished to live, nor to live in this way or in that. It has all come to me. Some day death will come too. All I have to wish is that it should find me doing my duty.'

'Is that all?' said Howard Jephson.

Was it the memories that hung round the ancient city? was it the feeling that

this was not at all the subject to speak about which he had sought her? was it that, from want of facing them, certain truths familiar in his childhood had grown to have an air as of nursery lore? Anyhow, no better words than these occurred to the combative young wrangler.

'Has life been so sad to you that you can think of nothing worth enjoying—between now and—then?'

The bunch of violets had drooped in Dulcie's hand, she was not looking now at the worn old city steps, trodden by the feet of so many forgotten men and women, each with an individual life history; she was looking away at the distant line of hills, ethereal blue with snowy tops shining in the afternoon sun.

'Sad?' said she; 'I do not know,' and then added quickly, 'when I look at you and Eva, I think my life has been different, you and Eva!' she said, putting them together and as apart from her. It jarred upon his ear. 'When I think of all—' Then she stopped suddenly. Dulcie knew Mr and Mrs St Germains did not like her to speak of her workroom experiences, and all that had gone before. This it was that often checked her from speaking, this feeling that she must not revert to her past, must not invoke its memories, as others did. But there was another feeling struggling within her now, and when Howard pressed her to go on, and say what she had been going to say, Dulcie spoke, but in a manner different

altogether from her usual manner, looking at him, looking very stilly and gravely, but still looking straight into his face, not with head drooped, and unobservant eyes as was usual to her. 'You know that I met you before?' she said. 'That is the reason I feel I can trust you, and know you. I knew you before. It was when Minnie Johnson—'

'Minnie Johnson!' exclaimed Howard, his eyes open wide with horror. 'How can you have come across a girl like that?'

'I knew her very well,' said Dulcie gravely! 'She was my friend!'

'Your friend! a regular—a girl who—'

'She was not a bad girl,' said Dulcie firmly. 'She and I shared the same room for years.'

'If any one has been like a sister to me, Minnie was my sister. But I remember how you said to your friend, "Seymour, you don't mean to marry her. Then, in Heaven's name, let the girl alone for some honest man in her own station in life—if any honest man will have her, that is to say." And you dragged him away. I have always blessed you for that. And you were quite right to say what you did say.'

'But how—but how—' asked Howard, his face grey and drawn, whilst he did not even look at her.

'We were in the same workroom,' said Dulcie. 'I was not called St Germains then; I was Dulcie Jones.'

'Dulcie Jones! Good heavens! Of

course I remember. The angel of our workroom!'

'Some of them called me so,' said Dulcie with a smile. What a sad little smile it was! Yet it told that once she had known how to smile, as a child, as a baby perhaps on her mother's knee. Poor mother! Poor mother! If they had all but known how that mother had doted on that child! There was a diary in which it was all noted. The day on which my sweet baby first seemed to know me — first sighed — first smiled— and so on. Who had noted her smiles since then? Howard Jephson did now. But for nineteen years the gentle girl had protected herself amidst the dangers and difficulties of this wicked world; her

sighs and smiles very much alike unheeded. How hard it is to believe a mother, whose whole heart was bound up in her child, can lie still in a quiet grave, whilst that child is uncared for, unshielded, unwatched over! Or do loving mothers still watch over their children from heaven?

'And you worked there, amongst that set of girls? It was a dreadful workroom, I heard.'

'I don't know,' said Dulcie, a puzzled look coming over her face. 'Sometimes I thought it might have been better, and then poor Minnie—'

'She was a wicked girl — a wicked, shameless girl,' cried Howard, his face growing crimson. 'I cannot bear even to

hear you speak of her. No good woman should—of creatures like that.'

'Should they not?' said Dulcie gravely. Then with firmness, 'But I have not been brought up among ladies and gentlemen. And, indeed, she was not bad; only, like Eva, she had a warm heart, and she did not think much.'

To Howard Jephson, who had last seen her in the Haymarket, dressed in tawdry finery, this seemed rank sacrilege. Minnie had, indeed, on that occasion been going to get medicine for her dying child, the bonnet she wore borrowed from the most generous of the workroom, who, alas! bought the means for her generosity as that bonnet but too clearly indicated. But young men are apt to be harsh in their

judgments of young women, and never slow to attribute bad motives. Horrified by Dulcie's mixing the name of little Eva, his own cousin, his aunt's cherished daughter, with that of a girl whom he believed to be of the worst description, from drifting into a disgraceful connection with whom he had not succeeded in rescuing one of his most intimate college friends, Howard said,—

'But you know you would never have acted like her, Dulcie!' Then the next moment would have rather bitten his tongue out than uttered such an insult.

But Dulcie had not been brought up among ladies and gentlemen. There was only an instant surprise on her part, then she said quietly,—

'No one would ever have asked it of me. Minnie was different. I think she killed herself when her baby died. No one ever knew rightly. But they found her dead. And its father never came to see the child,' added Dulcie, looking up at Howard, with pleading, tearful eyes now. 'That broke Minnie's heart, I think. She loved him dearly. And when she found he did not love her, she did not care for herself, nor anyone. She never even nursed her child. I took care of the baby till it died. Then Minnie died too,' said Dulcie. 'After that Mr St Germains came and fetched me away. I do not quite know why. I do not understand. And there is someone else may fetch me away again, I believe. I know nothing about it.

Only I wanted to tell you, I recollected what you said, and I have always blessed you for it.'

Slowly they walked back along the walls of Pœstum together. Howard Jephson had no word to say for himself. He did not repent his words, but he did not care to hear that Dulcie had blessed him for them. He felt now that they had not been animated by the best motives. The whole incident was a repulsive one to him, one better forgotten. He wondered also if Dulcie had recalled it now, because of that 'difference of station' whether these words had rankled in her mind.

'If I had thought she had been a good girl, it would have been different,'

he said. 'Only Seymour was a fool to think of marrying at his age, and she could never have made him a good wife.'

'What is it to make a man a good wife?' asked Dulcie, looking round quickly inquiring.

'You would make any man a good wife,' said he, almost testily, not in the least as if he were paying a compliment, but as if the truth were wrung from him.

'You think so. Any man?' said Dulcie meditatively.

Then, when it was too late, Howard saw that he had said just what he would least have wished to have said. But now they could see the horses being put into the carriages, and the others taking their places, and looking round for them to see

where they two were loitering. So they had to hasten to rejoin the rest of the party, and then they all drove off to the little museum, and bought coins in memory of the day, bargaining not a little before doing so. Then back again, all the long drive back again past the herds of buffaloes, past the fields now deserted by the gaily dressed peasants, past the graceful groups of weeping willows, and so with the last train back to Naples. As they passed out by Castelammare, and began to see the many twinkling lights of the grand spreading bay, some of the party felt astonished to think it was only two days since they had left Naples with its noisy hum, its never-ceasing flow of light and movement. They felt older, much older.

And Howard felt that he was hopeless of ever saving Dulcie. He had got his opportunity, got it just when he had determined to make the best possible use of it, and he had said the wrong thing, when evil was irreparable. He knew he never could undo it now. Dulcie would never forget, that he had said she would make a good wife to any man. 'The angel of our workshop!' how the phrase came back to him. He recollected when and where he had first heard it said, and how he had speculated what manner of girl it might be of whom that wild, wayward, and as he had believed, abandoned girl had thus spoken. Now, there she sat opposite to him in the train passing Pompeii, diligently studying the coins she

held in her hand, that she might learn at least something of Roman history from them. He had from the first noticed that Dulcie was very ignorant. But he saw now she was very patient. Mr St Germains and Eva were giving her a lesson, and Dulcie was doing her very best to learn.

Sir Ivor was not watching her now; he was staring out at the lights of Naples.

'There is a large steamer come in,' he said.

'That must be one of the Orient line,' said Lady Cecil. 'I heard one was expected on her way home from Australia.'

'From Australia,' said Mr St Germains, breaking off his lesson about the coins. 'Ah, well, the letter will not be directed

here,' he said, as if to himself, and went back to his beloved coins. He had found a prize among them—a gold coin struck in London, when London was a savage place.

'From Australia!' said Sir Ivor, and the expressions coursed themselves over his troubled features. He had been near Paradise that day; he had come back to this life with a vengeance now, and to Sir Ivor this life had for years past been a torture.

Little Eva's heart went out towards him with a great gush, as she saw the agonised expression on his face. She pitied him so. And she thought Dulcie had been unkind to him, walking away from him so long with Howard that day. To Eva it had seemed very long.

'You know Australia?' asked Lady Cecil, on whom nothing was lost, and who was always on the look-out for information.

'I have spent some years there.'

'The leaves of the trees all hang sideways, and give no shade, and the birds never sing there; is it not so?' asked she.

'For all I know there were no birds there, and the trees may have stood on their heads,' was the unsatisfactory answer she received. In another man it would have been called rudeness. But in Sir Ivor it was of course only eccentricity. Lady Cecil was rather pleased with it than otherwise.

CHAPTER VIII.

NO ONE HAD EVER LOVED HIM.

'Each man's life
The outcome of his former living is;
The bygone wrongs bring forth sorrows and woes.'
Edwin Arnold.

SIR IVOR MONTAGUE had had much against him in life. He had never known what it was to be loved. Some people may say this must have been his fault; others may incline to thinking it was his misfortune. His father had been a handsome man, given to saying very clever, cutting things,

who had fallen in love with a very handsome cousin of his. There being nothing whatsoever to hinder the match, no sooner had the young man offered, and the still younger girl accepted him, than settlements had been drawn up, and their marriage as much an arranged affair as if it had already taken place. There had been something irritating about this, and Mr Montague had already said cutting things to his cousin more than once or twice before she became his wife.

She was a handsome woman, who did not know how to say cutting things back again. But she could not endure having them said to her, and she did what was far worse. When their baby was but a year old, she ran away from him with an

Italian drawing-master. The Italian had expected Mr Montague would be glad to get rid of her; would readily consent to a divorce, and that then he would gain a rich wife. But she had not only been his wife, but his cousin. Mr Montague said he would have none of his blood disgraced by an alliance with a low-born Italian, and he would not get a divorce.

He lived on for eighteen years after that, taking his pleasure the while, and denying himself in no way, as a man can more easily than a woman. The house which Ivor called home, as a boy, was not empty of children, not his mother's. He was legitimate, and they were not; but he was the child of the woman who had run away, and somehow, whilst the

children were still growing up, the positions seemed inverted. Ivor suffered reproach and scorn; the others were petted darlings. Then his father died, and the positions were changed again. Ivor came into the property, as the lawful son and heir, and the others were outcasts. He hated the house, and would willingly have parted with it to the other children, who, to him, as to themselves, seemed defrauded. But this could not be. As it was, he was liberality itself to them; but this might be magnanimity, or it might be pride. They had always treated him ill, and there was no love lost between them.

Meanwhile, the Italian drawing-master was dead, and his mother had a tribe

of ill-conditioned children dependant on her. They were not rich like Ivor, neither again were they her lawful children in the world's eyes; but they had grown up around her from babyhood; they were the children of the man for whom she had forsaken worldly position, and, alas! duty. Whilst Ivor reminded her of the man whose cruelty, far more than her love for the Italian, had driven her to take the fatal step of leaving him, the man who, by his refusal to grant her a divorce, had cut her off from all possibility of ever regaining any sort of respectable position in this life. And he was also the first-born child, whom she had most cruelly wronged by her desertion of him. It would not be too much to say, that

his mother positively loathed the sight or mention of Ivor. She refused his money when he offered it to her, and clearly intimated to him that their paths in the world lay apart. He, believing she was in want, made arrangements that money should be paid to her each year, as if it were a legacy into which she had come in some way through the departed drawing-master, and then he went his way.

To college his way led him, and there he distinguished himself. It was natural he should work hard. What had he to disturb him from work? He could row and run, but what Eight or Eleven would have ever cared to associate with themselves a man so unsociable? Neither had wine nor billiards any attraction for him.

And as for women, only a good woman could arouse the least feeling in his heart, and good women do not thrust themselves in a young man's way. At twenty-one Ivor Montague was already a disappointed, embittered man. Perhaps love might have saved him. Who knows? Anyhow, no one loved him. He had come into his property, and no human being had rejoiced, whilst several had grudged it to him, and thought he unfairly deprived them of it. He had distributed *largesse* among them, and no one had thanked him, and as it is often in this life, this good action of his passed perfectly unnoticed. He came of a bad stock, people said, and nobody expected anything else of him than that he, too, should take to evil

courses. And they all stood by, leaving him free play to choose which he would take to. Not a fellow of a college,—not a don, not a professor, not even the wife of anyone in authority,—held out a helping hand to the young man.

Thus left perfectly free to go to the devil his own way, Ivor Montague did so. Whether it ever could have been otherwise, who can say? Yet some of us may remember a change of disposition, or at least of humour, taking its rise from some kindly word, or even only from a friendly glance. None came to Ivor Montague till he met Phyllis Lyndsay. Phyllis Lyndsay looked kindly on everyone—on her horse, on her dog, on the drunken old poacher in the village—then why

not at young Ivor Montague? But by doing so she stole his heart away, and the young man loved her with a consuming love, of which the girl, unimpassioned and most tenderly bred and nurtured, could naturally form no conception. He frightened her, but she was kind to him in spite of her fear. Then one day he told his love by the old sundial, and she at once refused him very kindly, very sorrowfully for any pain she might be causing, but determinedly, unmistakably. He told her she would repent it all her life, would rue that day all her life long, if she did not unsay her words. But his words were to her as the wind when it is boisterous. They conveyed no meaning to her mind.

He went away from her, and mounted his horse, and rode home on her.

Next day she heard that he had shot the poor brown mare dead. She was startled then, and supposed that was what he had meant by what he had said. She had often given that brown mare apples; and for years after, the poor thing's death weighed heavy on her conscience, and she regarded herself as its murderer. When young Standert told his love, she confessed to him the dreadful thing, how she had been the cause of the death of the horse of her first lover; and though half shocked, half amused, he had tried to show her she was guiltless, kissing her again and again to bring conviction to her trembling soul,

yet she had never quite shaken off the impression.

When her first baby was born, that brown horse haunted her; and when the baby died, she thought it was the avenging spirit of that poor dead horse had taken her baby from her, and she hoped that it was satisfied. But then after that, sorrow sat down by her hearth, and never went away again till five years after the poor young wife died—died of a broken heart, caused by Ivor Montague; died as he, at last knowing she was past living, told her the truth, and how he was the cause of all; and died cursing him with those tender, girlish eyes—eyes that had never till then looked on any living creature without tenderness and kindness in their gaze.

Then Ivor Montague had left Australia. He could not himself say what he had done for some years after that. He was under the impression he had travelled. But even he himself did not know whether he had really done so, or only tossed in brain fever, and imagined it. He had accomplished his will—made the girl he had loved for ever rue the day on which she had refused him. He had gained his wicked wish, and there was nothing left for him even to desire now. When Phyllis' heartstrings snapped, it seemed as if even a more deadly change had passed over her old lover. For he was like a dead man alive. Many people thought him distraught.

Years passed away. He succeeded to

a baronetcy and a large fortune. His mother died. He stood utterly alone in the world, and richer than ever, more prosperous as far as this world goes. Yet men regarded him with distrust, some of them with horror. Every now and then a kindly act was related of him. There were one or two happy couples who could tell how, at the darkest turn of their fortunes, when despair seemed closing around them, Sir Ivor Montague had sent money—a large sum of money—with the promise of more if necessary to compass the longed-for marriage. When thanked, he had put the thanks aside, as if they neither pleased nor troubled him, were neither here nor there. 'You have married her?' he would say sternly.

Assured of that, he would go his way, only pausing to add, 'If you find that by-and-by you need further assistance, let me know. If not, do not—trouble me.'

That 'do not trouble me' was glacial; but in any case, when further applied to, Sir Ivor had never failed to render help. He was not the kind of man of whom anyone would have expected this. But what was still more remarkable is that none of those he assisted ever presumed even so much as to touch his hand. Yet he could hardly be reproached with pride. Women of abominable character applied to him for money, knowing they would meet with no scornful words; indeed, to them Sir Ivor might be said to be truly

considerate. Perhaps he regarded himself as an outcast, and them as fellow outcasts. Anyhow, to women who importuned him in the streets by night, Sir Ivor's purse was always open, and they got to know it, and respected him, never applying to him unless in real need. Then he gave, and with pity in his eyes and voice, giving always what he was asked for, adding neither advice nor comment. When, as would happen more than once or twice on such occasions, the unhappy woman would be profuse in her explanations as to the reality of her distress, which alone had brought her so low, and caused her to apply to him, Sir Ivor would look down abashed and troubled, sometimes in humbled tones

asking her her address that he might send more than the money he happened to have about him. And those who thus gave their address, always knew with unerring certainty that they should in no case hear more from Sir Ivor than the money he would thus send. And they never did. Only a good woman had any attraction for Sir Ivor. But in the others he felt the presence of the womanliness that was still left, and they knew he did, and no woman ever behaved dishonourably by him, and feigned a distress that was not real.

He would have acted just the same by men in trouble, and did so act occasionally. But men have not that unerring instinct women have about them.

They did not so surely know that they might apply to him.

After all his loveless youth and bad upbringing, it is not so very little to say of such a man, that never through life had any one heard him make a censorious remark upon any human creature. And all the time his heart yearned after ideal purity, such as we only come across now and again,—such as he had once known in Phyllis, as he thought now he had found in Dulcie. And Dulcie knew he loved only what was good in her, and so, though she dreaded to be thus passionately loved, she supposed, when the three weeks were over, she would find it possible to be Sir Ivor's bride. Strange! how little girls, before marriage, reflect upon

what marriage really is! The more passionless, the less do they consider this. Eva, who was almost in love with Sir Ivor out of silly romance, shrank more from the idea of Dulcie's marrying him than innocent Dulcie shrank from it herself. Yet Dulcie had lived among all the vicious talk of a low London work-room. Eva had never even read a novel that could, by any chance, suggest a low idea of love to her. No one could be more ignorant of evil than she was; but Dulcie, although not ignorant, decidedly not ignorant, was innocent-minded, as only a girl can be. And dimly she realised that Sir Ivor loved only what was good in her. But the love even of what is good in another may become a consuming passion.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS ST GERMAINS' UNWORLDLINESS.

'He thought the world to him was known,
Whereas he only knew the town;
In men this blunder still you find,
All think their little set—mankind.'

Hannah More.

MRS ST GERMAINS had accepted a young man she had every reason to believe had not a penny, and so doing had once, and for all, made a great sacrifice to unworldliness, counting for the rest of her life. It was quite true that that very

day he received the gift of a rich living, and that, had it not been so, she might have counted upon not being allowed to marry him. And thus, at the very outset, entering upon the cares and the emoluments of a rich benefice, she had been less hampered by money difficulties, and freer to gratify herself in every way than her sister, who married the eldest son of a peer, tempted, as people said, by his prospective coronet; or even than her other sister, who married money, but money without birth, and therefore figuratively, but very decidedly, beneath the salt in those days at great county gatherings, whether political or social, at which the great county families held together, very suave and very courteous to all out-

siders, but never forsaking their own set, except in the person of a young man, or so tempted by a pretty face. And at which the town's people stood upon their dignity, and knowing they would soon be able to buy up those aforesaid county families, tried to look as if they were aware of it.

At these great gatherings Mrs St Germains' very wealthy sister hovered from one set to the other, belonging to neither, because at one moment she was talking to her own uncles, her cousins, and her aunts; at another moment to his; and the two did not know each other save across the counter, or at election times. But Mrs St Germains herself had her assigned place

among the county people, and yet, as far as money could go, she had never had a wish ungratified. However, in accepting a young man—notoriously a younger son, and at that time unbeneficed—she had sufficiently asserted her own unworldliness, and figured for the rest of life to herself as a woman governed by her affections, ready to give up everything for those she loved, and for herself, without worldly ambitions or wishes.

She had in reality accepted a very good-looking, very highly connected, charming mannered young man, and in so doing had gratified herself, just as she had gratified herself in every wish, big or little, ever since. The good

Rector, on the other hand, had clearly shown a taste for worldly pleasure in asking the most generally admired, dashing girl of his acquaintance, whose sister had just become engaged to the eldest son of a Peer, and who might be supposed herself to have an eye to coronets, to cast herself away upon him, a younger son, instead of selecting for his helpmate some good girl versed in Sunday schools with hair Madonna-wise disposed.

Mr St Germains was therefore all his life supposed to be tainted with worldliness. But Mrs St Germains had no doubts about herself; and when she ordered a new gown, or fell asleep on the sofa, or was very busy snipping roses in her garden, or as now ordained, that

a winter in the south was necessary to her health, had a vague idea that did she not see that, at least some consideration were shown for her, she might be guilty of undue asceticism, or pass altogether for a visionary, insusceptible to the merits of tangible beef and mutton. Not that Mrs St Germains was unamiable; she was amiability itself—always pleased, suggesting pleasures and enjoying them, and never within the memory of man known to say anything disagreeable or cross. So they all admired and made much of her, the servants, the parishioners, who would not have thought half so much of her if she had toiled herself into ugliness for their sake, as when she came now and again to see them with

well-fitting gloves, dainty boots, roses in her hands, and still softer roses on her cheeks. For Mrs St Germains was pretty still—very pretty.

For a man of the Rector's tastes, loving good wine, handsomely bound books, a well appointed house, a wife like Mrs St Germains was the crowning finish. But to the Rector's honour, be it said, that what his wife said of him was perfectly true, and he never denied himself, in obedience to her behests. No! the luxuries in his life were for his wife's sake, to give her pleasure.

Fortunately for the Rector, Mrs St Germains set her heart upon a good many little luxuries and pleasures, therefore he as her husband had his full share of this

world's enjoyments. And the Rector was a charming man. Only had he happened to have fixed his young affections upon a woman of self-sacrificing turn, it is possible Mr St Germains might have grown into an embittered, disappointed man. He might have passed for a saint then in the eyes of a few, but he would not have been half the blessing he was now in the world, when he was only That easy-going Rector, as young curates called him. And all this was thanks to Mrs St Germains, who, according to the good couple's acute seeing acquaintance, stifled all his highest aspirations, and never even understood the best part of him. As indeed she did not.

When Dulcie had been brought to

Mrs St Germains, it was quite true, as she had said, that it was her pretty name which had softened her heart to her. Then she had seen the girl's face, and been greatly taken by it. The story was romantic.

Mrs St Germains had not really wished for children, but she often fancied she had. There, she thought, was a daughter ready made, arrived, without any trouble, at the interesting young lady stage. But daughters do not come to hand without any trouble; and Mrs St Germains soon found she could not make a daughter of Dulcie.

The girl was very docile, very quiet, very gentle. There was no fault to be found with her; but she did not respond

or expand in return for Mrs St Germains' kindnesses. She met them with respect and gratitude. Now, daughters are proverbially ungrateful, accepting any amount of kindness from their mothers as a matter of course, and, in this day, rarely respectful. Treating a mother like a woman and a sister seems to be the best conduct possible in a daughter of the present day.

Dulcie, on the other hand, only with difficulty restrained herself from rising when addressed, flew to execute Mrs St Germains' lightest fancy, and never expressed an opinion unasked.

Having failed to find a daughter in her, Mrs St Germains was not in the least unkind to her. But she did now

think it would be rather a convenient way of getting rid of a girl who, in her household, fitted no place in particular, when Sir Ivor's devotion to her became manifest. For Mrs St Germains had, in her own heart, harboured from the first grave doubts as to Dulcie's rich Australian father, and his readiness to welcome his child after the lapse of so many years. Now she did not at all think it would conduce to hers and Mr St Germains' comfort to be saddled with Dulcie for the remainder of their existence. Nor was she at all unappreciative of the fact of Sir Ivor's being a baronet and a man of property. What more satisfactory turn, then, could things take, than that Dulcie should become Lady

Montague, whom Mrs St Germains had been led to befriend under the most extraordinary circumstances, and whose story savoured of the melodrama, married to that tall, dark, striking looking man, who must have a story too, though nobody knew it. What that story might be, it never occurred to Mrs St Germains to consider.

In certain circles it is the fashion to talk about having a story as if you had it in the same sense that a lady has a train to her dress, and it had no further effect—was simply an ornamental appendage.

Sir Ivor had a story of course. It heightened the whole thing. And he looked like it. What it might be Mrs

St Germains never imagined, as she contemplated giving him her adopted daughter in marriage, and speculated only as to whether it would be most fitting that the Rector should give her away, or perform the ceremony himself.

But with regard to matters within her ken, Mrs St Germains was most anxious and considerate for Dulcie. There was to be a ball at an Italian Princess's, and Mrs St Germains bestowed as much thought upon Dulcie's dress, as if she had really been her own daughter. Dulcie had expressed some repugnance to the thought of going; it was the first time she had done anything of the kind. But she shrank greatly from the scene, for which she felt herself all unfitted by her

previous training, and for which her present frame of mind unfitted her still more. For Dulcie was contemplating being led like a lamb to the altar, sacrificing all that life offered of youth, and happiness, and hope, and love, all—all to be laid at the feet of the most miserable man she had ever come across, to comfort him, if so it might be, and make atonement, as it were, for his great sins; for Dulcie never doubted of his sinfulness.

The quiet, gentle girl walked beside him, with her head drooped, and dreamt of being his wife, but never dared look up in his eyes to see what she might read there. To her the air seemed full of evil spirits, as she walked beside him; evil spirits she must charm away by a

life of single-minded prayer. And she prayed; prayed for him, and for herself, that she might have strength.

To a girl in this frame of mind, nerving herself for sacrifice, and speaking no word of her feelings to anyone, a ball was a most uncongenial idea. But it was to be the ball of the Naples winter, and Mrs St Germains was blind to any signs of reluctance. Even entreaties would not have moved her; and Dulcie could never have ventured to object in words. She only lingered for a moment, looking half as if she would speak, her face speaking very plainly the while. Then she passed swiftly out on to the marble balcony, and stood there among the pansies and geraniums, gazing over the blue, blue bay

away towards Capri. Mr St Germains looked at her.

'Dulcie does not like the idea,' he said.

'Oh, nonsense! What girl in the world ever disliked a first ball? She is only nervous about herself, and how she will get through it. But I am sure she will comport herself very well. It is such a good thing it should be here, amongst a mixture of nationalities, so that any little *faux pas* will hardly be noticeable. Besides, I shall keep an eye over her; for hers is just the style for these Neapolitans to go wild about. However, I don't intend one of them to carry her off. An English baronet is worth a dozen Italian dukes.'

'I should not wish the daughter of

my worst enemy to marry a Neapolitan, said the good Rector, who had not an enemy in the world.

All this was some while ago, before they had all driven to Pœstum, and Sir Ivor had spent one happy day, and Dulcie had unfolded her confidences to Howard Jephson, and for the first time made him feel as if there were a gulf between them, a gulf that he was beginning to realise could not be bridged over.

And now the rooms were fast filling at the Italian Princess's, and Dulcie, in white lace, with lilies in her hair, and Sir Ivor's pearls round her throat, was attracting as much admiration as even Mrs St Germains could have wished. Men with dark eyes and big mustachioes

stood and elbowed each other to point her out, or leant against the wall, commenting on her fairness. But how were Neapolitans to come near her when she stood by Sir Ivor's side? Sir Ivor, by three inches at least, the tallest man in the room, as thin as any Neapolitan, and with eyes that flashed as bright as fire, although his was a blue flare, like that from the timbers of some old weather-beaten hulk, soaked alike with pitch and salt for many a long year.

Little Eva had given her fan to one man, and her bouquet to another, and had six Neapolitans all at once asking for the honour of a dance.

She was at once the queen of the ball, and Howard Jephson felt proud of her,

as he stood, rather stiff and straight, holding the bouquet with which he had himself presented her, standing guard over his cousin, as it were.

Lady Cecil had said to him,—

'I rely upon you, Howard. Dear Eva is so impetuous, and you know what these Neapolitans—' and she made a little gesture with one hand.

As to Howard Jephson, he shuddered.

Thus it was the *forestieri* spoke of those whose hospitality they were about to accept, going in this instance to the house of a woman, who must have been cut in any circle in England, even in that in which fashion counts highest, and character lowest. No wonder the Neapolitans shrugged their shoulders at such

easy virtue, and did not especially regard the exact sincerity of those promises of friendship and fidelity made to haughty *gauches forestieri*, who decidedly did not mean what they said in return.

Lady Cecil certainly would never have dreamt of inviting the Princess to her own house to meet her own guests, nor would Mrs St Germains have cared to welcome her at the rectory. But they both went to her ball, and there discussed the various stories they had heard against her. There were plenty of them.

CHAPTER X.

DEATH AND THE MAIDEN AT THE PRINCESS'S BALL.

'The vision of scarce a moment,
And hardly marked at the time;
It comes unbidden to haunt me,
Like a scrap of ballad rhyme.'

Lowell.

THERE are descriptions in Camoens' *Lusiad* of islands haunted by demons, where the demons present themselves under the appearance of beautiful women with white arms. To Dulcie that ballroom at the

Princess's presented much the same appearance as one of those islands did to those loyal old navigators, who felt that in not lifting their eyes lay their only hope of safety, save that the women did not strike Dulcie as beautiful, their arms looking more like naked waists to her than arms, so large and coarse were they. It was the year of no sleeves!

Dulcie had seen nothing to excite comment even in little Eva, yet Eva was as fashionably dressed as any there. Her little arms well rounded, and exquisitely modelled about the elbows and wrist, with the blue blood showing well through them here and there, for the rest white as alabaster, and almost as firm, were, it is true, fringed with the

shortest of short sleeves, and her dress baby-waisted. But Eva was only a little lady dressed lightly for dancing; the others—Dulcie did not even care to lift her eyes to see them. So true it is that differences of this kind, which yet can be felt by every one, cannot be analysed and put into words, nor altered by the edicts of Lord Chamberlains or others.

Dulcie began to be thankful for small mercies, and as she was at a ball, yet felt dimly grateful that she was at least dressed as suited her own notions of modesty. For Dulcie's dress was high to the throat, and came down to the elbows, finished off at neck and elbows with a deep turned down frill of ex-

quisitely fine lace. This was not the fashion then, and gave her an old-world air, which eminently became her.

Sir Ivor stood by her side, and asked her to dance with him. Whoever had opened the ball with the tall, gaunt, melancholy man must have attracted general attention. It was years since he had danced, and he danced an old-world step. But a man who has once danced, especially an athletic man, never quite loses the art. There was nothing awkward about Sir Ivor's dancing. Only he was the tallest man there, and he danced a slow, measured step. All the *crême de le crême* of Naples gazed at the meek, quiet girl he danced with. And an imaginative lady said,—

'It is like an old illustration of the Dance of Death—Death and the Maiden.'

The expression took, and in an instant it was round the room, and every one was talking of Death and the Maiden.

A young man, handsome, but for the exceedingly vicious expression that as it were masked the beauty of his features, took a mental study of it. Painted, it would sell. But it would be difficult to paint. That old difficulty of expressing motion in a picture!

Sir Ivor stopped, and Dulcie stood beside him, not leaning on his arm, but with hands clasped tightly, her eyes fixed on the floor. It was a strange attitude in a ballroom, and afforded everyone an opportunity for staring at the girl, who

did not look up. Poor Dulcie! If they could have imagined the despair in her heart. She had brought her sacrifice; she felt that she might as well be Sir Ivor's wife now, since she had danced with him, and felt the serpent touch of his arm chill every drop of blood in her veins, and yet not died of it, not died, only suffered. To say that Dulcie would at that moment have married, and that joyfully, any man in the room who would have forced her to do so, and thus made it impossible for her to be Sir Ivor's wife would be short of the truth. The joy of release, at any cost, would almost have killed her. But she would not move a finger or an eyelash to purchase her own deliverance.

Dulcie said it, docile as ever. Mrs St Germains was in despair as she saw man after man go away dissatisfied. She had promised herself to keep an eye on Dulcie, and she asked her now what was the matter. Dulcie said her card was full. Mrs St Germains looked incredulous.

'Sir Ivor told me to say so,' said straightforward Dulcie.

'Oh—h, Sir Ivor!' said Mrs St Germains, then fairly startled into the following question:—'Are you engaged to be married to him, Dulcie?'

'Not yet,' said Dulcie.

Mrs St Germains was staggered by that answer, implying Dulcie intended it. Could that girl be an impostor, wearing

that air of modesty with a purpose, and in reality playing her cards well? It crossed Mrs St Germains' mind.

Howard Jephson asked the same question, and received the same answer. But no thought of this kind, however, occurred to him. He only remembered, with a pang, that he had intended to protect her, and now it no longer seemed a pleasure but a duty. The shadow of that disreputable workroom and her low associates hung round Dulcie like a pall. It obscured her sweetness and her fairness for a man, who had a strong partiality for the cultivated, the educated, what are called the aristocracy. Pleasure meanwhile spread her gossamer wings over the head of smiling, sparkling, dancing

Eva, with her plump little arms and her large cohort of dark-eyed admirers. Dulcie had, so to say, no following train. Only Sir Ivor, gaunt and terrible, offered his arm to her, and she took it. Was there a spiritual presence then between them reaching down from the world above, a mother stretching out a cold, white hand to hold her child apart from the man who said he loved her? Anyhow, they stood very far apart from each other, and Dulcie could not have looked whiter, had a ghost laid a hand upon her heart, and bade it not beat for Sir Ivor. It was beating wildly. Howard Jephson felt it was so, and sorrowed for her. He meant to save her. To him her words were like a supplication imploring him

to be quick or it would be too late. There they stood on the balcony together, Dulcie all creamy white, spirit like, Sir Ivor the demon lover of old legend. And surely that was an angel reaching down caressing Dulcie's hair and forehead, and separating her from Sir Ivor. No! it was but a stream of moonlight white and cold, shining out distinct from the rosy lights of the palazzo.

And there were Eva's little hands twining round Howard Jephson's arm.

'There, now, this is your dance. Because I am tired of all the others, so you may have it if you like.'

Howard Jephson looked down at his cousin—blue blood to the blushing finger tips, no shadow of the workroom about

her, and he thought he had never realised before not just how pretty his little cousin was, but what an air of distinction there was about her, and what an inspiriting companion she was. With her by his side, he felt as if he could yet save Dulcie. But how? but how?—that was the question which not all his Cambridge grind could help him to solve.

'I wonder if Sir Ivor knows that Dulcie is only Mr and Mrs St Germains' adopted daughter, and that she has a father and mother of her own in Australia,' said Eva. 'He looks so very—so very—One couldn't fancy his asking her father's leave. I think he considers it is all to be settled just between Dulcie and him. But it isn't,' said Eva, shaking her wise

little head; 'there'll have to be settlements, and all the world to be consulted. Do you think she loves him, Howard?'

'No, I am quite sure she doesn't,' said he impatiently.

'But then it will be very wicked in her to marry him—very wicked indeed,' said Eva, opening her eyes till they were quite round, and looking up admiringly at her cousin, who spoke so decidedly on a subject, that had long exercised herself.

'I don't see that,' said Howard. 'It is a bargain. A man does not always expect his wife to love him. And if it is an understood thing between them, and no deception about it—Sir Ivor does not care *that* for Dulcie's love. If he

can get her for his wife, that will quite satisfy him.'

'It would not satisfy me,' cried Eva indignantly.

'You!—you're a girl. Girls always want men to love them.'

'I am sure I don't!' cried Eva, tears of anger in her sunny blue eyes, the corners of her mouth going down, and her foot preparing to stamp, while her cheeks coloured scarlet. 'I don't want any man to love me at all. But I wouldn't marry any man who didn't love with his whole heart, and who didn't—didn't care whether I—loved him,' and there was Eva's chest heaving, and a sob.

It was Dulcie's hand was laid on her

shoulder—Dulcie's sweet calm face, that screened her from the observation of the room.

'What is it, Eva, dear?' she asked. 'What is it, Mr Jephson?'

'Eva wants her husband to care whether she loves him or not. Why, Eva, wait till you have got a husband, and you'll find him bother enough without throwing in jealousy,' said he, good-humouredly, stooping, meanwhile, and stroking caressingly his cousin's little hand.

'Jealousy!' cried the excited little beauty. 'How could a man be jealous of a wife, who thoroughly loved and trusted her, and whom he respected? If you think I'd marry a man who didn't

respect me too much— I tell you what it is, cousin Howard, you have been so long in Italy that you have forgotten what women are in England, and I think you are horrid, and I won't dance with you!'

'Eva, how can you be so silly?'

Howard Jephson looked at her, gravely surprised.

'Dance with him, Eva,' said Dulcie's quiet voice. 'You are tired, and he will take you out on to the balcony, and you will make it up. Cousins should not quarrel,' she added, as Eva, half pouting, and with one shoulder still heaving, condescended to lay her hand on her cousin's arm. Then more gravely, 'Let me look at you together this one

night—happy, young, of the same world and way of life. When I look at you two together I feel that — I — shall— never—'

She broke off. 'Marry Sir Ivor' was, however, what they both fancied she meant to say.

And Sir Ivor was standing still beside her, and he offered his arm and led her away, drawing her close to him as he did so. Howard Jephson distinctly saw Dulcie shudder.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT THE RECTOR DID NOT UNDERSTAND.

'AND so, my dear, I think we may conclude it is all settled. And, of course, her parents can't object. It would be too preposterous after all these years that they have never heard of her; and when there is nothing to object to. So that is the end of Dulcie—our adopted daughter.'

It was thus Mrs St Germains commented upon the events of the evening

in relating them to Mr St Germains on her return home from the Princess's ball.

The Rector had been beguiling the time, during which the ladies of his party had been absent by studying an abstruse folio upon coins, lent to him by one of those extraordinarily learned Italians, who seem to exist partly for the purpose of showing the world at large that it is a mere matter of choice if many Italians are ignorant. There is no limit to the amount with which they are capable of storing their brains, if so disposed. He looked up from his coins now, and rubbed his eyes. Then he got up, and walked into the balcony, and surveyed the moonlight, very crisp and clear.

'I don't like it,' said the Rector. 'I can't say I like it at all. And I am sure Dulcie doesn't either.'

'Now, Rector, how can you talk such nonsense?' said his wife. It was only when she was very much put out she called him Rector, but she was put out now. Sitting up till three o'clock in the morning does rather tend to make a good lady, wholly unaccustomed to such hours, somewhat irritable. Besides, the Rector was provoking.

'Isn't Dulcie arranging the whole affair for herself with an independence such as is hardly fitting, never asking anyone what their advice is, or whether they approve, or anything, but just coolly bringing Sir Ivor up to the proposing

point, and saying, " Not yet," when I ask if they are engaged ? '

'Sir Ivor has proposed long ago,' said the Rector. 'He required no bringing up to the point.'

'Well then, my dear, if you know so much about it, will you tell me why she has not yet accepted him ? '

'What, I don't understand,' said the Rector, looking out on to the moonlight, and Vesuvius sending forth fire in the distance, fire rosy red and animating,—'What I don't understand is, why she has not yet refused him. It is there where you women beat me, my dear,' he went on good-humouredly, knowing that nothing would gratify Mrs St Germains more than to have her sex treated as inexplicable.

'That the girl doesn't like him is clear enough. If he do but touch her hand she shrinks, whereas a girl who likes a man is always cuddling up to him. Oh yes, she is, my dear, trying to make him kiss her even if she tells him not.' Certain reminiscences made Mrs St Germains consider it discreet here to hold her peace. Certainly the Rector had kissed her at Pœstum, and neither then, nor since, which is more important, had she wished he hadn't. But she remembered she had made rather a piece of work about it, forbidden him to do so again, and been *very* much pleased when he disobeyed her. 'Women like being kissed, at least as much as men like kissing them. And a girl who loves a man isn't displeased if he holds her hand

a trifle longer than necessary. But I fancy when I'm having a tooth drawn I look much as Dulcie does, when Sir Ivor holds her hand. She bears it. So do I.'

'Then why do you think she danced with no one else to-night?' said Mrs St Germains, gravely interrogative.

'That's just what I don't understand,' said Mr St Germains. 'She means to accept him, I suppose? She never draws her hand away when he holds it, that I have noticed.'

'Why do you dislike him so, my dear?'

'I don't dislike him,' said Mr St Germains.

'I am sure you do though,' said his wife. 'And I can't think why it is. He is a fine-looking man, quite a gentleman, and never says anything foolish.'

'He doesn't say much of any kind,' said Mr St Germains.

'No, that is true enough.'

'Supposing it was young Jephson wanted to marry her, wouldn't you feel very differently about it?' asked her husband.

'Oh! Howard Jephson! why, we know all about him.'

'Yes, and we know nothing about Sir Ivor,' said Mr St Germains. 'Come, my dear, we'd better be going to bed, or you'll have a headache in the morning. We might just as well discuss the Sphinx as Sir Ivor. We know every bit as much about the one as the other, and not much more about Dulcie,' added the good Rector, sadly.

CHAPTER XII.

HOWARD JEPHSON TAKING THE MATTER INTO HIS OWN HANDS.

'Or when through me thou seest a man
Condemned unto a mortal death;
How sad he looks, how pale, how wan,
Drawing with feare his panting breath;
Thinke if in that such griefe thou see
How sad will *Goe yee cursed* bee.'—*Wither.*

IT seemed that a desire to impart information or obtain information was possessing everyone that night. Sir Ivor slowly stalking along in the moonlight was easily overtaken by

Howard Jephson, and as Sir Ivor paused and gazed at Vesuvius sending forth fire rosy red, Howard Jephson spoke.

'You are aware, I suppose, that Miss St Germains has no real right to the name she bears, but is only the adopted daughter of Mr and Mrs St Germains?' Sir Ivor turned his eyes from distant Vesuvius and its flame to his companion's face with a 'What is that to you?' air.

'Do you know what her real name is?' continued his companion.

'Dulcie,' said Sir Ivor, after a minutes pause. It was the most shutting up answer that he could have given, far worse than scorn or anger, implying surnames may be all very well for you and your like. Her name to me is Dulcie,

and no other. But Howard Jephson was not to be shut up.

'When I first heard of her it was as Dulcie Jones,' said Howard Jephson. 'She was then a milliner's apprentice in one of those great London shops, where the girls are trained to go wrong, if indeed they are not as much sold, as the bonnets they are *not* paid to make, as I have sometimes been tempted to think is the case. But I do not somehow believe that Jones is her real name.'

Whether Sir Ivor was listening or not, it was impossible to say. As far as the brilliant moonlight revealed anything, he had not moved a muscle of his face since he had said 'Dulcie,' and once more fixed his eyes on distant Vesuvius. Yet, if he

could have hurled his companion down the crater at that moment he would have done it, he so hated him for, as it were, mauling the fair fame of the girl, who was to him all girlhood, purity, love, hope, heaven, all, all personified. And Howard Jephson felt it was so, but he meant to save Dulcie if he could. He knew how the revelation of her past had affected himself, and he would at least try what its effect might be on the impassible man beside him.

'I understand that her father is a wealthy man, a great sheep farmer, somewhere or other at the Antipodes. But it is a question to my mind whether her romantic story is altogether true, and whether he will really acknowledge her

as his daughter, although—' He stopped short. Sir Ivor had turned, and was looking at him. And for the first time Howard Jephson felt the full cutting force of those keen blue eyes, that had so often stabbed poor Dulcie, till they had paralysed her into compliance with his will. He spoke now, speaking in a voice altogether unlike his usual tones. It was like the voice of some one struggling with mighty waters, choked, terrified, but struggling as for life and more. ' At the Antipodes?' he asked. But it was more a cry of overmastering agony than a question.

' Yes, somewhere or other in Australia,' said Howard Jephson. Even to himself his voice seemed petty and trivial, his

words flippant. What must they not have sounded to the other?

Sir Ivor stretched out his gaunt bony hand, laid hold of the other's shoulder, and shook him as a mastiff shakes a puppy.

'You lie!' he said, between his teeth.

'I do not lie, and you know it!' said Howard Jephson, almost black in the face, and quite in vain trying to disengage himself.

On this Sir Ivor burst forth into such a passion of oaths, hideous and terrible, as the young Cambridge undergraduate had never even dreamt of, and then with a final shaking he dropped him as a mastiff might drop a puppy and strode away.

Howard Jephson leant against the wall

beside which they had been standing, and tried to recover himself, and understand what had gone by. But he could not. He was out of breath, his coat sleeve was torn, he was bruised and aching; and besides all this he had come in contact with a violence of passion such as he could not credit, even when he himself had witnessed it. He thought he must have been dreaming—have been run away with by his imagination—began to recollect he had been told Neapolitan wines were more heating than they tasted, and tried to remember how many glasses he had drunk at the ball. But no! the iced lemonade he had partaken off on leaving could not be responsible for that volley of oaths, that seemed to make the

very place where he had heard them, a guilty place, unlike others. And as for the shake he remembered was there not his torn sleeve to testify to the reality of that, besides all his aching body? He crept home exhausted, and wondering what he had done, and why the mention of the Antipodes had so affected Sir Ivor.

'It is a long word to conjure with,' said the undergraduate, with an attempt at a smile.

But the smile was a failure. He felt he had been beside a spiritual manifestation more terrible than that belching of the flames from Vesuvius, and one that quite as significantly told of a fiery furnace within, threatening to overwhelm everything around it at any moment.

'Have I saved Dulcie? That is the question,' he said to himself. And all the time a letter was travelling slowly but surely from the Antipodes, which was to do all he wished, but in a way so terrible a young man of Howard Jephson's calibre could not possibly anticipate anything of the kind. It would be as much as Cambridge training would tolerate, if he believed in it, after it had all come to pass, and he had been told every detail. Even then Howard Jephson's nature rejected it as a thing not proven—just a tale like others he had been told.

But next day it seemed to him he had ruined all; for next day he heard that Sir Ivor had formally proposed for Dulcie's hand, and Dulcie had accepted him.

'She is not to marry him yet though,' said Lady Cecil, who was his informant; 'she is to wait till she has got her father's leave, unless he disowns her, as seems most improbable. In that case Mr St Germains would be free to act, but until he does so she is to wait her father's consent to ratify her engagement. Mr St Germains insists upon it, and I think the dear Rector is quite right.'

Howard Jephson, with an arm very stiff, and head still aching from the effects of the shock of the previous night, listened dumbly to his aunt, confused, that this then, which he had so striven to avert, seemed to be the outcome of the scene of the night before.

However, Mr St Germains had not

consented to the engagement being an acknowledged one until the letters should arrive from Australia. That at all events was something. Thank goodness a letter to Australia took some little time to reach its destination, and an answer at least twice that time.

He supposed Sir Ivor would not telegraph his offer, prepaying the acceptance of it, and he thanked heaven there was no telephone by which the whole thing might be arranged in a few minutes perhaps.

'What a good thing distance is!' said Howard Jephson. 'If it were not for distance and time the villains might have it all their own way, and no honest people would have a chance.'

'What a strange idea, Howard,' said his aunt. 'I can't think why all you young men will take to such reactionary ideas now. The great aim of modern science is of course to efface distance and time.'

Howard, however, was thinking of white-faced Dulcie, the girl he might have loved, if she had not been bred up in a workshop, outside the pale as it were, and among low characters, to whom for her sake, and in obedience to her behests, he intended to be more charitable for the future; but who, to the end of time, would always be repulsive to him, and cast an odour of impurity about her fairness by their association. She was the first girl, however, who had roused his fancy, touched his heart.

This young Cambridge undergraduate had never read Spencer, was guiltless of any acquaintance with Keats or Shelley, had only mastered two plays of Shakespeare for an examination. He was thinking of his first love now—the girl whom Sir Ivor had asked to be his wife, not of science, whether modern or ancient. He felt very much bruised, and stiff and uncomfortable, but he blessed heaven the Antipodes were a long way off, and that a letter must take at least some time to get there.

And all the while a letter was coming across the sea which would explain all, settle everything. But he was of this practical nineteenth century. How could he imagine anything melodramatic

really happening? Of course he had seen it on the stage; but that was what one went to the play for, to see things quite unlike real life—such as never really happen.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHE IS MINE.

'There is no armour against fate;
Death lays his icy hands on kings.'

James Sherley.

IT had all come about like a thunder clap. The sun was streaming in through the open windows, bringing with it great wafts of heliotrope and sweet peas, with which the marble balcony was adorned. Outside the men were singing, 'O bella Napoli, O dolce Napoli!' to the sound of discordant instruments; carriages were rattling

by; people were talking in the road below; Lady Cecil was sitting in the balcony beneath the shade of a white covered umbrella, talking over the events of the previous evening.

Mrs St Germains was arranging bouquets of Neapolitan violets in moss. Both had nothing to do but look up and see the blue, blue bay—'a piece of heaven fallen to earth,' as the Italians call it, and far off in the distance paler blue Capri, looking yet more like heaven, or an enchanted land, as but too many an Englishman has found it, who has there wooed and won a Capri girl, and then brought her away to find her a very common-place sort of woman as a wife, only somewhat plainer than the common.

In the ante-room giving on to the balcony Dulcie was frilling lace for Mrs St Germains' neck and sleeves. Eva sitting beside her contemplating a great bunch of red and white camellias, the biggest bunch she had yet seen—an offering from some one or other after last night's ball, and which little Eva had insisted on taking as a present to the Rector as a sort of consolation stakes for not having partaken of the festivities of the night before.

Enter Antonio, tall, dark-eyed, dark-moustached, impassible '*Sare Eevor!*' he announced. Sir Ivor walked straight up to Dulcie, took hold of both her hands, and said,—

'The three weeks are over; you are mine.'

Dulcie's frillings fell on either side of her, her head bowed, and she murmured,—

'I thought—I thought—' She would have said, 'that at the end of three weeks I was to decide.'

But she looked up, and read in his countenance that her fate was sealed. There was no struggling against that expression, no struggling at least for such as her, bred among the lower orders, accustomed to obey. With a great rush the blood surged to her heart, leaving her face more colourless even than usual. Dulcie for the first time in her life felt faint, her knees failed under her, her head drooped once more, and leant against Sir Ivor's breast. He stooped, and pressed a hot, passionate, burning

kiss upon her cheek. That kiss recovered Dulcie like a dash of cold water. She looked up once more and tried to move, but Sir Ivor had tight hold of both her hands.

'You are mine—mine,' he said.

Oh! think of it maidens ere too late, it is thus men speak of women, whose humble slaves they are, till they have won them! Does ever a woman call her husband hers,—her property, as a man calls a wife his? And he never is hers, as she is his in theory, and, alas! only too often in practice. But Sir Ivor appropriated Dulcie now before marriage. There was something terrible in that 'mine, mine,' something that made little Eva shrink away affrighted, and take refuge by her mother's side.

'Dulcie, is this true? Have you accepted Sir Ivor?' asked Mrs St Germains, pausing with one bunch of violets in her hand, and speaking more distinctly than her wont.

'Yes,' said Dulcie.

There had been a moment's hesitation, then she spoke very low, indeed, but firmly. There was a far-away look in her eyes, fixed on distant Capri, but apparently seeing further off things than that. If her eyes had not been so wide open, Lady Cecil thought there would have been tears in them. Sir Ivor had never yet let go her hands, and he was looking at her with an intensity, that went to Lady Cecil's heart, there was such a yearning tenderness in his

eyes, his whole face seemed softened, as he strove and strove to read some returning tenderness in the girl's still features, and as Lady Cecil thought with a sigh, failed to find any response. For not the most exalted imagination could read any love in Dulcie's face. She had said 'Yes,' however.

'Mr St Germains must be consulted,' said his wife promptly rising, and going to find the Rector.

'Nothing can be considered certain till he has consented. He looks upon Dulcie as our daughter, you know, Sir Ivor. Not but that I am quite sure he will be pleased,' she added, more courteously than sincerely.

Sir Ivor never heeded a word she was

saying. He seemed unconscious of any one in the world but Dulcie.

'Dulcie, do you love him?' said little Eva, almost reproachfully.

The child's heart was touched by the first great passion, with which she had come in contact. She saw this strange, violent, melancholy man hungering for a word, or look of love. And she saw Dulcie, so gentle and tender, her friend and ideal, standing still and white and unresponsive, apparently unconscious of the great want she was not attempting to satisfy.

Dulcie looked at Eva. For an instant the two girls' eyes met. There was little difference between their ages, but it was as if a disembodied spirit looked from

its shroud upon a woman warm and palpitating with life's pleasures, hopes, emotions.

'I have promised to marry him, Eva,' she said.

And quietly though the words were spoken, Eva covered her face with her hands, and turned away, and cried silently over the tomb of Dulcie's life, over the grave of Sir Ivor's heart hunger, which never, never, never could be satisfied now, for Dulcie did not love him, and yet she had promised to become his wife.

Mr St Germains came in.

'I understand that you have asked my adopted daughter Dulcie to be your wife?'

'Yes,' said Sir Ivor, looking round, surprised apparently that any one should interfere.

'And she has consented?' asked the Rector.

'Yes,' said Sir Ivor, 'she is mine;' still that terrible iteration, that dwelling upon her as his, his property.

Dulcie only bowed her head.

'Of course,' said the Rector, 'neither Mrs St Germains nor I would ever think ourselves justified in coming between Dulcie and the husband she might choose for herself, or interfering with her happiness in any way. And I need hardly say we feel much honoured in the person of our ward. The Montagues are an old family, and I believe the estate is in

excellent condition, and from a worldly point of view the match is an excellent one for Dulcie. Still we only consider ourselves trustees for her father and mother, and of course nothing must be considered as decided, till we hear what their wishes are respecting her, and have received letters from Australia.'

A change came over Sir Ivor; the tender heart-yearning seemed to have passed away, and with it the air of youthfulness it had brought with it. His brows contracted, as if a knife had struck him; his eyes gleamed fire, and he passed an arm round Dulcie's waist.

'Remember your promise, Dulcie,' he said.

'I do not know what promise Dulcie

may have made you,' said Mr St Germains, somewhat tartly, for the St Germains always stood upon their dignity when it was not acknowledged, and Sir Ivor certainly had so far shown Dulcie's guardians scant respect, and treated them with little enough ceremony. 'But I know that the girl is under age, and that it is impossible she should marry you here without the consent of her lawful guardians, who, in this case, cannot consent without having first received the permission of her father and mother. The delay will probably be but a short one,' he added, in a propitiating tone to Sir Ivor.

'I want no delays,' said the latter, impatiently. 'I have waited three weeks,

because Dulcie asked me. I can wait no longer now. I am not a young man to spend time dilly-dallying. Can you give me back one day of that happiness you now ask me to dispense with? Am I so young that I can afford to lose an hour? You—you,' he added appealingly to the Rector, 'you married young. You have a long life of happiness to look back upon. I—not one hour till I met her. She asked three weeks' delay. I granted it. I never importuned her by word or look. The three weeks are over to-day. I can wait no longer. No one has a right to ask me to wait since Dulcie consents. She is not *your* child!' he added as an afterthought, but with such a tone of agony in his

words, Mr St Germains' heart smote him.

Even Lady Cecil's colour rose, and she looked down, while Mrs St Germains plucked at the Rector's sleeve, saying,—

'Give in, my dear, give in; we have really no right to object if Dulcie wishes it.'

'Do you wish it, Dulcie, my dear child?' asked the Rector paternally, catching at this as a ready way of escape.

Sir Ivor had an arm round her; he was not looking at her, but she could feel the grip of that arm; could feel too how it trembled; and she stood there, slight and pale, and quiet, with eyes gazing seaward at distant Capri. She did not even look at the Rector as she stood there, slight and pale, but silent.

'If you care about settlements, I will make what you please. I will settle every penny I have upon her, or mortgage my lands for your benefit; only let me have her—now, at once,' said Sir Ivor.

There was a crimson flush on his face. His eyes were burning.

'Dulcie, do you wish to be this man's wife now at once, without further delay?' asked the Rector.

Dulcie turned and looked at him. Till now she had never realised that there could be any further delay, when once she had given her consent. She had not thought she was forced to consent; had thought that at the end of the three weeks she might either do so or refuse,

though knowing in her heart all the while that she never could refuse, unless something interposed to deliver her—Howard Jephson or something. But now she had consented, and it seemed that, notwithstanding, there was still a respite possible to her.

'Do you wish to be this man's wife now at once, without further delay?' asked the Rector.

Dulcie's eyes said, 'No!' but again she did not speak, standing there, such a slight, gentle, yielding girl, but silent—silent always.

'I cannot consent to it,' said the Rector, mildly, after a pause of a moment or two, during which he digested the situation, Dulcie's silence becoming eloquent.

'Then do not,' thundered Sir Ivor, suddenly turning upon him, his eyes flashing fire. 'Who wants your consent? Not I, in the name of heaven. The girl has consented, and that is enough for me. Dulcie, you have promised,' he said, and again he bent and kissed her brow.

Did no angel stoop down, and with a burning brand avert that desecrating kiss from the pure unstained brow of the white maiden? Or was it an angel's burning brand that touched Dulcie's brow —not Sir Ivor's lips? Anyhow there was a red mark where he seemed to have kissed her.

'Dulcie, remember you are my ward, under my roof and my protection,' said

the Rector, now no longer a clergyman, but a St Germains every inch of him—and a St Germains defied! 'Whatever that man asks of you to do, recollect you have no right to forsake the roof that has taken you in, and the friends who have sheltered you. When the letters come from Australia we shall see. If your father casts you off, then you will be free to do as you please. I shall make no claim to your further obedience. But till then I hold you as in trust for him—a father from whom a daughter has been torn away by dark villainy, and who longs to clasp you to his heart again. It may be he will then give you in marriage to this man who woos you. It will be for him, then,

to consent or refuse. But till then, till we hear from him, I must request you, sir, as you have defied me, to quit my house. And Dulcie, remember, you are not only bound in common gratitude, in common decency, by every principle of law, order, and morality to respect my wishes; but you have in reality no other choice. It is impossible for you to become this man's wife here in Naples without my consent. Recollect we are in a foreign country, where the mass of the people are Roman Catholics. You are under age. You cannot become this man's wife here without my consent; and I will not give it till I hear from your father.'

The Rector had spoken like a man.

Dulcie stood silent, but very attentive before him. Mr St Germains could see she was drinking in every word he was saying. He felt satisfied she would obey him, if only she could stand out against Sir Ivor. But could she? Could even Mr St Germains himself? For now Sir Ivor changed his tone. His arm had fallen from Dulcie's waist. He had pressed one hand to his head, like a man distracted. He advanced now like a suppliant.

'Oh, do not—do not,' he said. 'If you have the power, as you say, yet do not come between me and all my hopes of happiness. They are all centred upon Dulcie. If I live—I breathe—it is but to make her my wife. She is

young and fair and pure. There is no one like her—no one. There never was another—but one,' he groaned, and his whole frame shook. In his agony he shed tears. 'I had no thought of happiness; I never looked for it, nor dreamt of it. Then I met her, and at once—at once my whole heart burned within me, and I lived for one thing, and one thing only She might have refused me. She might—what more natural?—have hated, shrunk from me, despised me—feared me.'

As Sir Ivor spoke, Dulcie drew near to him. She took hold of his hand, and almost drew his arm round her. Then she leant her head upon his shoulder, and stood thus calm, quiet, shielded by his

embrace, feeling the agony of his panting heart, while he went on,—

'She does not; she has consented to be my wife. Do not stand between us. Oh! do not, sir. As you hope for heaven, as you pray for mercy, do not come between a miserable man and his one hope—his one hope!' repeated Sir Ivor.

He was white, and his knees knocked together.

Even the Rector now was affected. He reached out his hand, and set a chair for Sir Ivor. Mrs St Germains tried to dry her eyes; Lady Cecil's face was hidden by her handkerchief. Eva had re-appeared from the recess of the balcony, where she had retired to cry, and, with tear-stained face, was standing staring,

round-eyed. She did not know what to wish, what to think. But she took note that, as the others did not that even then, Sir Ivor spoke of Dulcie as his one hope, without excepting that the other side the grave.

'I do not know what to say. I really do not,' said Mr St Germains. 'You speak as if I were asking so very much. It is such a little delay. Letters travel so quickly now-a-days. Will you give me time to think it over? Come again to-morrow. I really cannot see why you should mind waiting a few days or weeks,' he added, *sotto voce.*

'You would not speak so if you were in my case,' said Sir Ivor.

He was sitting down now, looking so

worn, so exhausted, he seemed hardly to have strength to say even that. Those few minutes seemed to have aged him. Dulcie brought him a glass of wine. He took it, then looked at her, put it down, and burst into such sobs as terrified all present. Mr St Germains led Dulcie away. Lady Cecil and Eva and Mrs St Germains fled affrighted. Then the good Rector returned, and laying his hand upon Sir Ivor's shoulder, said,—

'My dear friend, you must compose yourself.'

When had anyone called Sir Ivor dear friend before? Anyhow he did not compose himself. Suddenly Dulcie appeared again, laid her cool hand upon his burning brow, and said,—

'I did not say, Sir Ivor, that I would obey Mr St Germains. You must give me time to think. Anyhow, I have promised to be your wife, and please do not be unhappy.'

Then Sir Ivor looked up at her, and looked till Mr St Germains wished, with all his heart, he had never thought it his duty to stand between them. He could not bear to do so any longer, and ostentatiously blowing his nose, he too left the room. Presently after that Sir Ivor went too.

Then Mrs St Germains returned and took hold of Dulcie's hand, and said,—

'Dulcie, my dear child, what will you do?'

'I have not made up my mind yet to disobey Mr St Germains,' said Dulcie, looking up with wide-open eyes. Then the next moment she tottered, and fell on the floor in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XIV.

'THERE IS NOTHING ELSE HE CARES FOR.'

'Gentle compassion is sure to overcome in fight, and to be firm in maintaining its own. Heaven will save its possessor, protecting him by his gentleness.'—*Tâô Teh King.*

AFTER this there came a terrible time for Dulcie. At one moment Mr St Germains was so touched by Sir Ivor's grief and love, that he relented, and was on the point of consenting, that the marriage should take place at once. At another, his pride was up in arms at Sir Ivor's unguarded

defiance of him. Or, worse still for Dulcie to bear, he would treat her as ungrateful, inconsiderate, and almost openly wish he had never seen her. As to Mrs St Germains, she considered the best thing that Dulcie could do would be to run away, and thus relieve them of all responsibility; and to this Sir Ivor unfortunately urged her. Meanwhile Eva, whenever she saw her, kissed her as one would kiss a dead person, and shed tears, and said, 'Dulcie, you do not love him,' as if this were the head and front of her offending. Whilst Lady Cecil was even more explicit than Mr St Germains had been as to the difficulties Dulcie would encounter in contriving a legal marriage without the consent of her guardians.

And Howard Jephson, the while, kept out of the way. No wonder Dulcie stole into a church to pray, and there praying, looked at the many silver hearts and other votive offerings, and so doing, vowed a vow also, if she could be delivered from great danger and difficulty, and the sore troubles that beset her. There were sometimes Sisters praying in the church, good women, whose faces betokened they had escaped from some of this world's cares, yea, even in this life. Dulcie looked at their calm faces, and gathered comfort. Some day, perhaps some day she too— How blessed it seemed, after that workroom and her previous troubled life, and now that terrible prospect of being Sir Ivor's wife! Beautiful

and heavenly, almost like Capri in the distance. Then Dulcie humbly crossed herself, and prayed for Sir Ivor and for herself, that she might be delivered from temptation, and not too much covet the peaceful life of a Sister, a devoted woman working for God, and God only, amongst other women like-minded. Oh, happy, happy life! too ideal for this world, where women have to become wives, and in various ways strive to make men happy—men who are not like-minded.

Meanwhile, Dulcie longed to serve God in his poor, and not knowing yet how best to do so, she looked wistfully at the poor-box, and longed to put something in. Then Sir Ivor stood beside her, and handed her gold, and Dulcie placed it

in the poor-box for herself and for him, and felt happier than for many a long day. That seemed like the promise of a life she would rejoice to live, if Sir Ivor would give her the means of helping others.

'And the Sisters?' said Dulcie, her eyes suddenly lighting upon their well-worn habits, and clasped hands, from which hung old worn rosaries. 'They would like something for their poor also.'

So Sir Ivor gave her gold again; and thus it came about that the pale-faced English girl bent over the two dried-up Italian Sisters and disturbed their orisons, astonishing them by thrusting gold into their not unwilling hands.

'For your poor,' said Dulcie. She had learnt as much Italian as that at Naples.

Then she retired to Sir Ivor's side, amidst the thanks and blessings of the Sisters, promising to pray for her and hers. After that came Sir Ivor's prayers. He supplicated her to leave the St Germains and Naples, and go away with him; go anywhere, only away with him; to be with him; his wife, and his only. If Dulcie had only known how to marry him legally, she would have gone. But the girl had been bred up amongst the poor, and uncared for; she had not lived in that workroom for nothing. She had seen her companions go away with gentlemen, who vowed they loved and honoured them, and meant marriage, when possible.

And Dulcie knew what it had all resulted in; and her heart sunk, possessed with a horrible terror, such as no lady, who has not lived through it all in the person of her friends, could possibly feel before a delayed marriage or anything not strictly legal. And Lady Cecil had been very impressive in her declarations that a legal marriage was impossible on the Continent. It must take some days to reach England, and Dulcie could not spend that time, even with Sir Ivor, not as his legal wife. If it had not been for that sick terror, before anything not strictly legal, and formally accomplished, the girl must have yielded to Sir Ivor's entreaties; for she felt in her heart that Mr St Germains would not really be

displeased with her, although he thought it his duty to stand out; and as to Sir Ivor, he was a changed man already. He had been gaunt and worn before; his face was haggard and livid now, and his whole form emaciated. He looked like a man who might die of unsatisfied love; was dying of it indeed. He trembled now, and his voice sounded hollow, as he pleaded with her in the church porch,—pleading with her as for life itself. Dulcie grew whiter and whiter, till at last her eyes were shining out like two coals in her utterly white face; her hands feverishly plucking at her dress. When she saw Howard Jephson driving by in a little open carriage; and with one bound she was out of the church, down the steps,

and beckoning to him—'Oh, save me! save me!' she cried.

In an instant Howard had stopped the carriage, drawn her in, and then bade the man drive on, not the least remembering where he was driving to, but just following out Dulcie's gesture, as with her cry, 'Save me!' she sprang into the little carriage. It was only then he glanced round, and saw Sir Ivor looking like a hungry wild beast, whose prey was snatched from him, yet making no effort to oppose her going, save by the despair in his ravenous eyes. For some time Dulcie was too much agitated to speak; she lay back, gasping and shivering a little. And the young man respected her emotion too much to do anything, but clasp one of her hands in

his. Such a friendly clasp! Poor Dulcie! On her deathbed she will remember that firm, kindly pressure of Howard Jephson's hand as the most reassuring thing of human she met with in life.

They drove on together along the gay, noisy Chiaja, out on to the Posilipo road, always only urging the driver to drive fast, fast, without heeding where they were going. Yet, by degrees, the loveliness of the scene had a soothing effect upon poor Dulcie.

'I cannot hold out,' she said, at last, looking straight into Howard Jephson's eyes now, yet not withdrawing her hand from his. 'I must give way and be his wife. Mr St Germains must let me. I will ask him on my knees!'

'Do you wish him to give way?' asked the young man. 'Somehow, Dulcie, I do not quite know. But I have thought you were thankful to Mr St Germains for opposing this delay.'

'In my heart, yes,' said Dulcie, speaking very low.

The young man somewhat tightened his hold of her hand. He had been very near loving this girl once, and she was the very first who had ever made him feel a girl might be something far sweeter, more delightful than the dearest man friend ever could be. He was not in love with her; but he had been very near to it only the other day. How short a time it was since they had wandered about at Pœstum! And yet, to both these young people, what

years seemed to have passed away since then!

'Do not marry him if you do not love him, Dulcie,' said Howard Jephson.

'Love him!' said Dulcie, and turned round and looked at her companion quite astonished. Did anyone then suppose that she loved Sir Ivor? Did they not all know that, in marrying him, she felt as the Indian widow does when she mounts the funeral pyre where her dead husband lies.

Howard Jephson understood that look.

'O Dulcie, dear Dulcie,' he said, 'do not marry him feeling like that. I could not bear that you should. We none of us could bear it. We all love you, Dulcie, and want to help you. Let us help you.

Oh! think what it must be to be able to be with God, young, now at once, without having lived years and years of sorrow and misery! and just to have nothing to do every day and all day long, but to pray, and to try to help others, and to love everyone, and yet be loved specially by none. I have never dared to ask God to grant it to me. But I know in reality, I ask him for it in my heart all day long, every day. If he granted it to me—'

And Dulcie's face suddenly shone, as if transfigured. And Howard Jephson, to his amazement, saw a new Dulcie beside him, not the meek, quiet, pale-faced maiden they all knew so well, and loved each after his or her fashion, but an inspired young prophetess, as it were, with

shining eyes, and a face that beamed like embodied sunshine.

He could not sympathise, only wonder, and again a new gulf sprang up between them, a gulf that was more impassable than even that of the workshop and her past life. For Howard Jephson suddenly realised that there was more in Dulcie than he had ever dreamt of, and that she was at least as far beyond him in the spiritual life, as he might be in the intellectual. Howard Jephson had not even got so far yet as to have spiritual wants, not to speak of having satisfied them. Dulcie at that moment was all a-gush with spiritual craving. And meanwhile the sun shone on the beautiful bay of Naples, and the waves danced, and

the light breeze even blew a little blush into the girl's pale cheeks.

'We ought to be going home,' said Dulcie; 'I did not notice how far we had come. Were you driving this way when I stopped you, Mr Jephson?'

'I do not remember where I was driving,' said he. 'I am only so glad I happened to pass. This drive has done you good, Dulcie; but are you sure it has done you enough good? Have you courage to hold out? You must not marry this man, feeling as you do. Believe me, my dear, dear Dulcie; indeed, I am sure I am speaking the truth. It is not right to sacrifice yourself.'

Dulcie grew grave.

'When Mr St Germains gives way,

there is no hope for me,' she said. 'I must marry Sir Ivor; I have promised, and I must keep my word. He cannot live without me. There is nothing else he cares for.'

'I know that,' said Howard Jephson, equally gravely. 'But you—why should you—'

'I have promised,' said Dulcie, and unless God helps me, there is no escape. Only, when you spoke of love just now, surely you knew I would far rather be lying beneath that beautiful blue sea than Sir Ivor's wife. It seemed so strange to speak of loving him. Sometimes when I have seen you, and you have spoken kindly to me,' she went on dreamily, 'I have thought how it might have been,

if I had been different, and lived another life. And it has seemed as if it might have been sweet, sweeter even than the convent,' she continued, yet more dreamily, 'to have some one very dear, to whom one was dear also—some one whom one could love and trust and understand. I have thought about it all; but I have lived—such a strange life,' she added, wearily. 'It could not be possible for me. And now Sir Ivor has come, making demands upon me—demands which I feel I dare not refuse. And sometimes I think—I think—I hope it is not wicked to think it—that some day he will die, and that before I am an old woman, perhaps I shall find that rest in the convent which I cannot help longing for

now, but which one ought to be satisfied to expect in heaven.'

They drove home in silence after that. Again Dulcie's words had opened out a new train of thoughts to the young man, thoughts which would never quite pass away from him again. And he was engaged in spiritual conflict with himself for the first time in his life.

When they stopped at the door of the palazzo, where the St Germains were lodging,—a palazzo commanding a view over half the town, and all the bay,—Dulcie held out her hand, and said,—

'Thank you, Mr Jephson, for being very kind to me. I shall never forget all your kindness to me, and wherever I am, or whatever may become of me,

there will never be anything that will give me more happiness than to hear of you—good and happy.'

'That is about the saddest thing you could say,' said the young man, his eyes fairly brimming over with tears. 'And the worst of it is, I quite believe you, and that you have no hope of happiness for yourself in this life.'

He almost crushed her hands in his, and Dulcie, with one foot already on the marble staircase, turned round and looked at him. She smiled very stilly, but yet she smiled. He felt as if it were for the last time. That drive along the Posilipo road, when she had fled to him as a hunted thing, had been perhaps as happy a time as any in all Dulcie's sad

young life. It was somewhat sorrowful to think that. And Howard knew he had such capacities for happiness in himself. It was a mercy for him his life had somehow got mixed up with this pale girl's. Howard Jephson's was a character that ran a danger of becoming very hard and self-asserting. Dulcie was fast softening him. He would never be hard and self-asserting now. In after life, people often wondered why it was so. Men of his school mostly are, especially to women.

CHAPTER XV.

NO RIGHT TO INTERFERE.

'We know diseases of stopping and suffocations are the most dangerous in the body; and it is not much otherwise in the mind. . . . but no receipt openeth the heart but a true friend, to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it, in a civil shrift, or confession.'—*Bacon.*

'MY dear Dulcie, where have you been? You said you were only going to S^ta^ Maria,' said Mrs St Germains, looking up from the *Morning Post's* account of the gay com-

with Mr Jephson along the road to Posilipo.'

'Driving with Mr Jephson!' exclaimed Mrs St Germains, laying down the *Morning Post*, and drawing the girl nearer towards her. 'But, my dear Dulcie, that was not a very proper sort of thing to do. And did you not think that we might be anxious?'

'I did not think of anything,' said Dulcie, speaking in just the same quiet tones as before. 'I—I was frightened—Sir Ivor—and Mr Jephson was passing in a little carriage, and I asked him to help me; and he stopped the carriage and told the coachman to drive as fast as he could, and I do not think we either of us thought of anything till we

were out on the Posilipo road—a long way. I am very sorry if it was not—proper,' said Dulcie, speaking with increasing effort. 'I never thought of that. Mr Jephson was very kind. I am sure he would not—if—' and Dulcie paused.

Truth forbade her finishing that sentence. Proper or not, she felt sure that Howard Jephson would, in any case, under any circumstances, take her away from Sir Ivor if it were possible for him to do so.

'Do you know, Dulcie,' said Mrs St Germains, touched by the girl's confusion, and beginning to think she saw a key to things generally, 'do you know, Dulcie, I almost think if it were Howard Jephson was in love with you, you would

not be waiting quite so calmly for that Australian letter that never comes. If it were Howard Jephson you were to marry—come, now,' and she lightly tapped the girl's cheek with a glove she was holding in her hand.

'Howard!—Mr Jephson!' said Dulcie, her eyes open wide, whilst she turned deadly pale, and trembling, sunk into a chair. 'Mr Jephson! he, in love with me! Oh, why do you speak of such things to me—why?' and her voice sounded like a cry of pain. 'You know I have got to be Sir Ivor's wife—I have got to be! I have got to be! And a man like Mr Jephson—what have I got to do with him, except to be grateful?—he is kind—kind! If I had been your

daughter—' began poor Dulcie; and then broke off suddenly, staring out at the sky rosy with sunset, and folding her hands tight, tight, whilst she still trembled violently.

'Dulcie! my dear child! I am so sorry I said anything,' exclaimed poor, impulsive Mrs St Germains, quite beside herself on seeing the terrified expression on the girl's white, drawn features.

Then suddenly Dulcie broke down altogether with a loud convulsive sob, and the next moment she was clasped in Mrs St Germains' arms as if she really were her daughter. That moment drew the two nearer together than ever before; the veil of reserve was at last broken down between them, and Dulcie

was no longer treating Mrs St Germains as a lady who had been very beneficent, and to whom she, as a humble dependant, was bound to be very dutiful and grateful, but as a woman of like flesh and blood, only somewhat older, and who therefore might be expected to be somewhat motherly. And Mrs St Germains, for all her little foibles and worldlinesses, and despite all the petting and spoiling that had been lavished upon her with no sparing hand almost all the years of her life, was a true woman. The motherly heart was there, only waiting to be called out. And she rocked Dulcie in a protecting embrace now, feeling how she too might have loved the girl if, as Dulcie had said, she had been her daughter.

She began to understand it all, dimly, so that she could not have put it into words, but still so as to enter into Dulcie's feelings, as she had never done before, that the girl could not feel herself one of them, was not one of them, knew that they only made believe to consider her one of themselves, and that it had come before her now to realise the full sweetness that might have been hers, had there been no make-believe at all.

Dulcie was the first to recover herself. She put up her face and kissed Mrs St Germains' soft, rosy cheek.

'Thank you, mother,' she said.

It was the first time she had ever spontaneously called her so.

Mrs St Germains, whose heart had

yearned for a child, who had bought baby frocks, making believe they were for her friend's babies, and only given them away after those babies had grown into quite big boys and girls, and then with tears and heartache, Mrs St Germains kissed her convulsively, crying as she did so.

Then Dulcie got up very stilly, and with hands lightly folded, said,—

'Mr Jephson was very good to me to-day. He has always been very good to me; he and Eva. But Sir Ivor needs me. He has no friend. I had no friend till Mr St Germains came. We match together although he is rich and different in some ways. Yet I feel it. His life and mine are bound together. I have

felt from the first as if he and I were apart—alone—together. And I am *sure* God will help me to do my duty, whatever may happen.'

This last Dulcie said very solemnly. Then she stooped and kissed Mrs St Germains, murmuring 'mother, mother,' very low but distinctly, and after that she went to her room.

When Mrs St Germains peeped in half-an-hour afterwards, she saw Dulcie on her knees. Was it accident or chance that she was kneeling, and with upraised eyes, beneath a picture of the Virgin? Not the Virgin mother with Holy Infant on her knee; not the Mater Dolorosa doing penance for the sins of all the world, but the Virgin with a mantle

wrapped round her, and a starry crown and clouds of adoring cherubs all around, Virginity triumphant!

Mrs St Germains thought that the word virginal applied very well to Dulcie.

She went back, and told her husband all about it when he came in. The Rector had already met young Jephson, and heard his version of the story. He was very serious.

'It is plain she does not love the fellow,' he said. 'I wish her father would write from Australia, saying he must have her, and would not give her up. I don't see my way to saying it. I don't see how I could, nor on what grounds. But it is plain she is sacrificing herself to him. I don't think, my dear,

when you thought of marrying me, you said you were sure God would help you to do your duty, whatever might happen.'

'I am afraid I did not,' said his wife. 'But then I have always noticed the young people of the present day are much more spiritual than we used to be. If you just take our nieces,—there's Dorothy wont go to a party in Lent, and Nora and Cassy have no carpet in their bedroom, and always learn psalms, or something by heart, whilst they are doing their hair. And then look at Eva here full of collecting money for a school for the Neapolitans, and writing letters to all the girls of the Metropolitan Servant Girls' Association, whilst she ought to be pleasuring, and only going to this ball under protest.

I recollect crying, till my eyes were red, because my sash had not as wide ends as one of my cousin's for my first ball. No girl would do that now. We were all much more frivolous in our day. Now, my dear, just compare yourself with young Jephson. Why, you know your father had twice to pay your college debts, and you were always going to races, and yet you were going to be a clergyman. Now Howard actually did not know the other day when the Liverpool cup was run, nor anything about it.'

The Rector laughed good humouredly at the recollection.

'Well, I can't say I think Howard Jephson is a good example of the progress of the present day in spirituality.

I grant you the young ladies, but the young men are very material. Has Jephson read the *Fairy Queen*, do you think? and would he recognise a quotation from Shakespeare even? I fancy not. But seriously, what is to be done about Sir Ivor?'

'I can't think what there is wrong about Sir Ivor,' said Mrs St Germains, for about the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time.

'Could you fancy loving him yourself, my dear?—as your son-in-law, I mean,' continued the Rector. 'Supposing Dulcie were our real daughter, could you fancy kissing him, or even laying your hand on his shoulder?'

'No, I couldn't fancy that,' said Mrs St Germains.

'Neither can Dulcie,' said the Rector. And yet she intends to marry him. When she was praying just now, are you sure she was not praying that she—or he—might not die first!'

'Oh, but that would be wicked,' said Mrs St Germains. 'Dulcie would never do anything wicked. Do you think—do you think, my dear, he really is not a good man?'

'God forgive me, if I misjudge him,' said the Rector; 'but I doubt if there are many souls as black as his in hell.'

'Oh, my dear! But what an awful thing to say!'

'It is awful,' said the Rector, thoughtfully. 'I did not know I thought anything so bad of him, and yet now I have

said it, I know that is what I have been thinking from the first. And yet if you ask me to point out one single wrong thing that Sir Ivor does, I cannot. I do not believe he would look at a woman, that was not Dulcie. He barely tastes wine, rarely smokes, is altogether most abstemious, is most liberal with his money, and apparently kind-hearted towards the poor. And yet—and yet—' said the Rector, musingly. 'I cannot shake off the conviction that his soul is blacker than that of many a drunken profligate. And it is to this man we are to give our adopted daughter, Dulcie, in marriage,—a girl, whose white soul has been no more sullied by the scenes she has passed through, than the plumage of a white

dove is sullied, because the streets it flies through are as the streets of Naples. My dear, it cannot be. It cannot be. God must avert it somehow. For as for me, I feel I have no right to interfere.'

CHAPTER XVI.

'THE AUSTRALIAN LETTER HAS COME AT LAST!'

'THE Australian letter has come at last, Sir Ivor,' said Mrs St Germains, as she got into a carriage by the side of Lady Cecil to drive to San Martino to see the view from the old convent. Mrs St Germains was opening her lace-trimmed parasol. Her bonnet of brown lace, and wreaths of roses set off her soft gold brown hair and

pink cheeks. She had gloves so well fitting, she had but just succeeded in buttoning them with Dulcie's help. She had rows upon rows of flounces, and a lace and bugle dolman for appearance, and a fleecy white shawl for possible future needs. She looked the picture of this world's happiness, getting into the comfortable cosy carriage beside Lady Cecil, and opposite Eva and Howard Jephson. The latter had been intending to walk up and make place for Dulcie; but it had been explained to him that Dulcie was not coming. The Australian letter had arrived, and she was waiting to know its contents, as soon as Mr St Germains should return. Mr St Germains had gone to a week-day service, and was

expected back presently. This had all been said rapidly among many interruptions, expressive of interest, from the trio in the carriage. Then Mrs St Germains had caught sight of Sir Ivor lounging on the wall of a little garden, opening on to the road just beside the door of their palazzo, and she had beckoned to him to come near. Sir Ivor came near, white umbrella in hand, looking very much like a bit of the wall, on which he had been lounging, in his nondescript dust-coloured clothes. He had been lying in the sun among the lizards. Only the lazzaroni, the lizards, and Englishmen do that at Naples.

'The Australian letter has come at last, Sir Ivor,' said Mrs St Germains with

the pleasant kindly air of telling him a bit of good news, which he would be sure to be glad to hear. Sir Ivor was flushed with the heat of the sun it seemed; his eyes gleamed, so none of the little party could face them sufficiently to note their expression. Howard Jephson, however, could not but observe that, though the last time they had spoken, Sir Ivor had shaken him, as a man sometimes shakes a puppy, and though but yesterday Dulcie had cried to him for help from Sir Ivor, and he had carried her off from him, yet now this strange man, apparently absorbed in something else, took no note even of his presence. He had been preparing himself to meet concentrated hatred or jealousy. There was nothing of all this

visible, as Sir Ivor possibly bowed slightly, but otherwise took no further apparent notice of Mrs St Germains' communication.

'Mr St Germains has gone out to the morning service, but he will be back presently. Dulcie is waiting till he returns, to hear the contents of the letter, and then they are to take donkeys and follow us to San Martino, if everything is satisfactory,' added Mrs St Germains with a friendly little nod and smile as the carriage drove off, leaving Sir Ivor standing by the roadway in his dust-coloured clothes, just the colour of the wall on which he had been lounging, a gigantic crimson camellia half dropping out of his button-hole, and

a white marguerite hanging from the hand that held the white-covered green umbrella.

'What a splendidly handsome man he is,' said Lady Cecil, turning away from an involuntary backward glance at the solitary figure standing out erect against the background of Italian sky.

It was a prematurely hot day, and all the air was sparkling, the dust very white on the roadway. Somehow it was the first time they had any of them commented admiringly on Sir Ivor's appearance, and the three others at once turned their heads and looked at him, with his tall sinewy figure, the crimson flush on his face, and his gleaming eyes looking after them.

'Paint him in the foreground of what landscape you will, and he will never look out of place,' whispered Lady Cecil. 'Now of what other Englishman could one say that? Howard, there, would simply ruin the best picture even Turner could paint, if he were stuck in with his stiff straw hat, and *noli me tangere* air.'

'Howard would not spoil a picture of the boat race, mamma,' said little Eva, somewhat poutingly.

'A picture of the boat race, my dear! Don't call those horrid medleys of Frith's pictures, please. Oh yes, Howard would do very well for Frith. But Gerome could not wish for a better model than Sir Ivor. He fits in

with the landscape as if he were part of it — sinewy, graceful, suggesting so much that is never realised. I never thought of it before, but he is like a panther.'

'About to spring?' asked Howard Jephson cheerily, but evidently mocking at his aunt.

'He is like that great big red camellia in his button-hole,' said Eva pettishly. 'There is no scent about it, and it will be dead in another hour and leave nothing behind it.'

'I hope you don't think that of Sir Ivor, Eva?' said Lady Cecil gravely.

'I wish I had not told him that about Dulcie,' interrupted Mrs St Germains uneasily, half leaning forward in the carriage, as if to give an order to the

coachman. 'I ought not to have told him she was alone. Now he will go in and see her.'

'Yes, yes, he will go in and kill her!' cried little Eva, springing forward. 'Oh! do let us go back. Poor Dulcie!'

'My dear Eva, kill her!' said Lady Cecil, in her severest tones.

'I meant kill her with boring her, mamma—of course I meant that,' said Eva imploringly; 'didn't I, Howard?—didn't I? That's one of my words, isn't it?'

'A very foolish word,' said Lady Cecil icily. 'You know, Eva, there is nothing I object to more than people making a language of their own. The object of language is to convey thoughts to others.'

'Shall we go back? Do you think we had better go back?' asked Mrs St Germains, looking uneasily from one to the other, the colour fluttering in her cheeks.

She had not felt well that day, and she had thought the drive would do her good.

'Oh no, no! I insist upon it, my dear Mrs St Germains. Are you allowing yourself to be made uneasy because this foolish child of mine talks nonsense, and then says she meant *nothing by it?*'

Lady Cecil could be very cutting when she chose.

Somehow, Howard Jephson found the moment convenient for removing a little bunch of forget-me-nots from his buttonhole, and sticking it into his cousin's dress.

'They match your eyes,' he said; a most transparent untruth, for the eyes that looked full up at his, half tearful, half smiling, were as much bluer as an Italian summer sky is than an English one. But though the forget-me-nots did not particularly match Eva's eyes, they restored gladness to her face.

'We all know what it is to be kilt entirely,' whispered that naughty Howard, and by that time little Eva's composure was entirely re-established, and her face once more began to sparkle like the sunshine.

Lady Cecil found it more convenient to seem not to hear her nephew, who was a prime favourite of hers, and could not do wrong in her eyes. Which was only fitting, seeing he had done every-

thing that was expected of him both at school and college, and not only contrived to appear like a gentleman on a small allowance, which he had never exceeded, but even so managed as always to treat his sisters to some pleasure or other out of his pocket-money when at home, instead of, like most young Englishmen, swallowing up all that might have gone to pocket-money for his sisters in his own pleasures.

Even this year it was well known to her, that Howard Jephson had travelled second-class, because he was particularly anxious his mother should not stint herself in anything in order to provide an outfit for the youngest boy just going to school. Lady Cecil respected her favourite nephew far too much ever to

find fault with him. And Howard never imposed upon this partiality of hers, except now and again to protect little Eva, somewhat constantly under correction. For Eva was not the least like her two elder sisters, who had always held themselves so erect, besides being so well grown, acquired perfect French; and who, if they had not, according to the poet's song in 'Patience,' ended each by a marriage with a first-class earl who kept his carriage, yet had at least married excellently in the world's eyes, and their mother's, the first year of their being introduced to that same naughty, often misjudging, always misjudged world.

Little Eva, on the other hand, had not grown; spoke French like a school-girl, was loved by everyone, but showed no

signs of making a career for herself. As her mother sometimes sadly reflected, no one would ever be able to see her in a London ballroom, where, among the five-feet-eight and five-feet-elevens of our aristocratic young ladies, her little person would be entirely swamped.

'Sir Ivor is a perfect gentleman,' said Lady Cecil, slowly nodding her head, as was a way of hers, when she wished to lay down the law absolutely and without appeal. 'Even if he does go to see Dulcie, I should always have perfect confidence in his treating her with the courtesy and consideration of a gentleman. Besides, Mr St Germains will be coming home directly, and even if Sir Ivor wishes to be by while the Australian letter is read, I really do not see how anyone can object.

His patience has been sorely tried by being required to wait for it. And one cannot wonder at that. The poor man is not young, he loves Dulcie devotedly, and I do think my dear friend, the Rector, has been a little hard upon him. It does not seem quite reasonable that a father in Australia, never heard of till the other day, should be allowed to dictate absolutely his child's future, and possibly put obstacles in the way of such a perfectly satisfactory and really brilliant marriage as this would be for Dulcie.'

Mrs St Germains said nothing. She generally perfectly acquiesced in Lady Cecil's dictates but somehow a recollection of that scene with Dulcie the previous day oppressed her, and she looked down sadly, with a troubled colour on her

cheeks, oblivious of her lace-trimmed parasol never yet hoisted.

Howard Jephson bent forward, and opened it for her.

'You are letting the sun burn you, Mrs St Germains,' he said, with a kindly smile; 'that will not do your head good.'

'Thank you for being so kind to our Dulcie,' exclaimed Mrs St Germains, holding out her hand suddenly, and pressing his with effusion. 'She says all her life she shall be grateful to you and Eva.' Then Mrs St Germains' tears began to flow, and the others all tried to look as if they were not noticing.

Only Howard Jephson looked very red and uncomfortable. Suddenly he began removing that part of the dust cloak that

covered his knees, and opening the carriage door.

'What are you doing, Howard?' asked his aunt.

'I am going backt o her. The Rector may not have come back after church after all.'

'Let us all go back,' said Lady Cecil. 'Coachman—'

'Oh! no, no!' said Mrs St Germains. 'No, dear Lady Cecil, I could not think of it. My absurd fears! And, of course, as you say, it is ridiculous. Sir Ivor is a perfect gentleman, and—and there are the servants. Thank you very much, Mr Jephson. But I could not think of it. Besides, you are the last person,' she added, anxiously.

'If you went there would be sure to

be a quarrel. No, certainly *you* must not go. If anyone went I must. But of course it is all nonsense. Only I wish I had not told him Dulcie was alone. It was quite like asking him to go and see her, almost indelicate. And, of course, I feel as if I were her mother, and so I was a little provoked with myself. That was all. One does not like to feel as if one had flung one's daughter at any man's head, or made her cheap in any way. Does one?' said she good-humouredly, smiling at Eva.

Thus she tried to talk away her fears, and make believe they had been something quite different from what they really were. And gradually the equanimity of the little party was restored. Lady Cecil seemed quite her usual self, as she

and Mrs St Germains rested looking at the view, whilst Howard and Eva were poring over various objects of interest in the museum, Eva for once in her life instructing Howard, for Howard, as might be supposed, was wholly ignorant about silk embroideries and faience.

'Do you not think it is rather unwise to let your nephew be so much with his pretty cousin?' asked Mrs St Germains, fanning herself.

'Why so?' asked Lady Cecil.

'Well, of course, he is not a suitable *parti* for her—has got his way to make in the world. And I should think you would look for something better for your daughter.'

'I might look a long while before I ever found anything better than Howard,' said

Lady Cecil, looking at the two figures in the distance, with that fondly soft expression which perhaps she wore when Lord Cecil courted her, but which very few people would have believed in, on the features of the highly cultivated, decidedly advanced Lady Cecil. 'He has got his way to make, do you say? Yes, but he will make it, my dear Mrs St Germains. And of how many young men can we say that?'

Not many, certainly,' said Mrs St Germains. But this was a surprise to her. So it was not a thoughtless act of imprudence after all, but Lady Cecil actually wished that her penniless nephew should become the husband of her pretty penniless younger daughter, had probably had it in her head, when she had arranged that he should meet them on the Continent. Mrs St Germains

began to think that Dulcie had possibly been somewhat in the way. Did that drive of yesterday, of which of course Lady Cecil had heard account for her seeming irritability on first starting that morning? Was this also the reason she always so distinctly encouraged Sir Ivor's suit, and considered Mr St Germains' scruples exaggerated? Mrs St Germains did not know, but she began to fear she had been no true mother to Dulcie, just accepting as her lover the first man who offered, and not duly poising in her mind the acceptability of all possible suitors. Oh dear! thought Mrs St Germains, 'I suppose it all comes from having a daughter ready grown to one's hands, and not having been gradually prepared for the responsibility through all the years of babyhood and

girlhood. Oh dear! oh dear! Poor Dulcie!'

Then they looked at the church with its colossal rosettes of grey basalt, and glowing pavement of mosaic; and Lady Cecil made some very clever comments on the pictures, to which Eva at least listened admiringly. Howard Jephson knew nothing about pictures, any more than about faience, and Eva always regarded her mother as the most wonderfully clever woman, as indeed she was. Suddenly they saw a man in a white cap and apron.

'Why, surely, that is your cook?' said young Jephson, looking at Mrs St Germains. 'What has he come here for?'

He went up to the man, gave him a push, told him to hurry home again at once, and then returned.

'You are wanted Mrs St Germains. Something has gone wrong. Should you be afraid to go down on a donkey? It is much quicker, and I will hold you on, if you'll trust yourself to me.'

It was all settled in a minute. They were all very quiet, and no one asked any questions. It seemed as if they had all been expecting a messenger.

Mrs St Germains did her best to manage the donkey. She did not complain of her flounces being tumbled, and Howard was really very good. He took all the pains he could to spare them, and he himself carried her parasol with one hand, whilst with the other he held her and the donkey together. But, arrived at the bottom of the steep descent, it was really wonderful the celerity with which he hailed a carriage, saw it had not a good horse, seized upon

another, got Mrs St Germains into it, and sprang into it himself, leaving his aunt and cousin to follow as best they could. He and Mrs St Germains never exchanged a word as they drove along, till, just as they were nearing the house, Howard looked at her. 'You are rather pale,' he said. 'Would you mind drinking out of my flask? I always carry one with me. I am sorry to say it has no cup.'

'Oh, I feel quite well,' said Mrs St Germains.

'Do you mind?' repeated Howard.

And she drank.

She certainly was behaving well, but her pleasure-loving nature asserted itself. To the last she never asked him what the cook had said, thus sparing herself the painful knowledge as long as possible.

CHAPTER XVII.

'OH!—AH!—YES! THE AUSTRALIAN LETTER!'

'Say what remains when hope is fled?'—*Campbell.*

THE sun streaming in through the open window, across the flowering plants in the balcony on to Dulcie's bent head and folded hands, as she knelt in prayer by the table on which lay the yet unopened Australian letter. That was the sight which Sir Ivor saw, as, brushing past the Italian man-servant, he

himself opened the door of the St Germains' sitting-room.

There it lay, the serpent that was to sting him, and crush the joy out of his life! And beside it his guardian angel—his one hope; the one girl he had loved, Phyllis—Dulcie, all in one, his hope, his joy, his heaven, his all.

Sir Ivor stood still in the half-opened door.

'Dulcie,' he said.

His voice sounded unnaturally deep, and yet with such sweetness thrilling through it.

Dulcie rose at once and looked at him. In her hand she held the letter.

'Will you give me that letter, Dulcie?' asked Sir Ivor.

'It is not for me; it is for Mr St Germains,' said Dulcie.

'I know that—I know that,' said Sir Ivor; 'but it is from your father. It is about you; and I am your affianced husband. I have the right—'

'No, no, Sir Ivor,' said Dulcie quietly, but very decidedly, and she passed the letter over into her other hand, and slipped it into her pocket.

Sir Ivor watched her do it with his glittering eyes, then he advanced a few steps, and threw himself on his knees before her.

'Dulcie,' he said, 'as you were praying to God but now, so I pray to you. Fly with me from Naples ere it be too late—before that letter is opened. By all your hopes of heaven, by all your faith in a God Who dooms no human being to despair, I implore you, have

mercy upon me, and fly with me now—now, at once, ere it be too late—too late!'

His breath caught; he was almost sobbing—the tall, gaunt, strange man actually sobbing on his knees before her.

The girl trembled, and she bent and passed her arms round him, as a mother might round a dying child, and rested his head against her breast.

'Dear Sir Ivor, it cannot be; you know it cannot be. Why have you so set your heart upon this—before this letter is opened now? Till now it has always been before this letter had come. I have promised to be your wife. I have promised, and indeed I will keep my promise, whatever this letter may contain. But I cannot be your wife without my

guardians' consent. Why do you break my heart by asking what I cannot grant?'

'You will never be my wife, Dulcie, if once that letter be opened.'

The face he raised to hers was grey with agony. He was still on his knees before her.

'For the last time I entreat it of you. Come with me to England; come before that letter is opened. There I can easily enough make you my wife. Dulcie, you have heard of men dying in the desert of thirst. As those men would beg for a drop of water, as the damned in hell cry for mercy, so I beseech of you, oh, Dulcie, hear my prayer! Hear my prayer before it be too late—before it be too late! O God! O God!' he cried,

'it is too late!' and he fell forward almost senseless on the floor.

His ear, sharpened by agony, had detected, long before Dulcie did, the sound of some one coming up the stairs. The outer door of the apartment might now be heard opening. Evidently Mr St Germains was returning from morning church.

Dulcie stepped forward into the ante-chamber.

'Here is the Australian letter,' she said, and gave it to him.

Mr St Germains hardly noticed what she said, she looked so terribly agitated.

'Dulcie, my child, what is the matter?' he asked, and folded his arms round her, and pressed a kiss upon her brow.

It was icy cold. But almost before he

had time to feel this the girl was snatched from his arms. He had seen Sir Ivor framed in the doorway behind Dulcie. Sir Ivor had stood motionless whilst the letter was given by the girl to the man. He could easily have snatched it from Mr St Germains now; but he did not. He snatched Dulcie from him, pressed her to his heart, showered kisses upon her. Then, whilst the terrified girl was half holding out her arms for help, half trying to ward off those devouring kisses, there was a sudden gleam of a knife, a gush of blood, a fall; and before he knew what he was doing, Mr St Germains was bending over Dulcie and Sir Ivor, both alike insensible upon the floor. But the girl was unhurt. It was Sir Ivor who was dead. His must have

been no unpractised hand that had dealt himself so deadly and so sudden a blow.

Mr St Germains carried Dulcie to her room, tore from off her the dress stained with the dead man's blood, and only then could persuade himself that Sir Ivor, in dying, had sought to wound no one but himself. The Australian letter was forgotten, whilst the cook, as the first available messenger, was despatched post haste, in his garb of every day, to fetch Mrs St Germains from San Martino, the man-servant being sent equally post haste for a doctor.

The cook reported to Mr Jephson that Sir Ivor had stabbed himself, and that the Signorina was dying. Of course Howard Jephson thought she had been stabbed too. When he got Mrs St Ger-

mains upstairs, there was Sir Ivor's dead body still lying on the floor, the doctor feeling his pulse to make assurance doubly sure. He had already been to Dulcie. Dulcie was delirious. Howard Jephson stood between Mrs St Germains and the dead man, as he hurried her through the room trying to hinder her from seeing.

Again Mrs St Germains' pleasure-loving nature came to his assistance, and she made no effort to see. But arrived in Dulcie's room, suppressed motherly instinct asserted themselves; she threw her gloves and dolman aside, and went at once to the girl's bedside, ready for anything.

Howard Jephson stood still for an instant in the doorway, looking at

Dulcie's flushed cheeks with the fair hair straying wildly over the pillows, and the hands clutching convulsively. His heart ached, and he thought many things during that instant. There lay the girl, murdered, as he believed, by the man whom he had meant to save her from marrying. He had not saved her. And there she lay murdered, as he believed.

Then he went back to Sir Ivor.

'Is he quite dead?' he asked.

'Quite,' said the doctor, 'although the knife was almost turned aside by this!' And he showed a dented miniature of a girl of long ago with the short waist, and sleeves, and round sash our mothers wore when they were young; and yet a miniature so like Dulcie, that at first

Howard Jephson could hardly convince himself it had not been meant for her. By degrees only he began to see differences, and wondered he had thought it so like. This girl in the miniature wore her hair quite differently, and carried her head more proudly than ever poor Dulcie had done. But what a sweet girlish face it was! That miniature set Howard Jephson thinking again.

'Look!' said he to Mr St Germains, as he entered the room.

Then the Rector also started at the likeness.

'Why, it is Dulcie. No! it is not. How like though!'

Howard Jephson proceeded to ask,—'He stabbed himself before he stabbed her, I suppose?'

'No, no!' said the Rector. 'Dulcie has not been stabbed, except mentally. I do not know what had passed. She came out to me as I came home, holding a letter in her hand.'

'The Australian letter,' said young Jephson.

'Was it? Oh, has that come at last? Well, I don't know what has become of it, for she looked so white and terrified, I was fairly frightened. Then Sir Ivor came out, snatched her from me, kissed her, and stabbed himself. Dulcie only fainted. And now—now she is not quite herself yet. This poor man! I wonder what he had been saying to her—why he killed himself?'

'The Australian letter,' repeated Howard Jephson in the same tone as before.

'Oh! — ah! — yes! The Australian letter! Do you think that had anything to do with it? I wonder where I put it,' said the Rector. 'I must have dropped it, I think.'

'Is this it?' asked Howard, stooping and picking up a scrap of paper, that had somehow got brushed into a corner.

It was torn and wet with the dead man's blood. The Rector shuddered involuntarily, and made a hundred little arrangements before he at last finally got it open. Then in the dead man's presence he read it, Howard Jephson standing by impassible. Suddenly an exclamation from the Rector called the young man forward.

'Look!—look there!' cried the Rector, in a tone of horor, his eyes almost start-

ing out of his head with astonishment. Howard Jephson looked over him, and together they read the sentences:—

'The man who stole my child from me must have been Ivor Montague, who always loved my wife, who followed us out to Australia, who was alone with her when she died. I believe he then told her the truth, and killed her, my poor Phyllis. He left the colony directly afterwards. I never saw him again after my wife died, but I found in her journals records of the pain he had given her by his importunate lovemaking, of which she had never had the heart to tell me, because, fool that I was, I rejoiced in having at least one Englishman for a neighbour, a man from our own old neighbourhood,

to whom I could talk of things of long ago. In her journal, after she was dead, I find again and again an entry like this:—

'"Again he has referred to those dreadful words he used when I refused him. 'I will make you repent this to your dying day,' and he says he will stand by my death-bed, and ask me if it is not true. Wild words, and yet they haunt me."

'I believe he did stand by her death-bed, and ask her this. I believe he watched my wife dying day by day of the sorrow he had caused, and which, even to the end, a word from him could have dispelled. I believe he stole our child. And though a dying man's arm is powerless to reach him now, the curses of God will rest upon his soul, and may the cup of happiness be dashed from his lips just

when it is filled to the brim, as he dashed mine! And may his own hand deal the fatal blow, since mine is powerless to do so! For my child I can but commend her to God, who will care for her, for her mother's sake. My worldly goods are hers, my blessing, my prayers. May the Father of the fatherless recompense to you what you have done for her!—Yours most gratefully and most sincerely,

'ARTHUR STANDERT.'

They read to the end, then both looked at the dead man—dead by his own hand, with the girl he had loved separated from him for ever, just when he was about to make her his.

'Dulcie must never know,' said Howard Jephson, speaking with the rapid decision of youth.

'No, Dulcie need never know,' said the Rector, speaking more deliberately. 'She need not now, and it would poison all her life to think she might have been the wife of the man who killed *her*,' and the Rector tapped with his forefinger the miniature of the girl of long ago—the girl who was the image of Dulcie, only brighter, prouder, more spirited—Dulcie brought up a lady, not nurtured in a milliner's workroom. 'She shall have this likeness of her mother. She need never know how it was found. We will let her think her father sent it to her and it was dented in the post.'

As the two men bent over the miniature of the sweet girlish face, a mist came over their eyes, and for a

moment blotted out the bright young face, so full of hope, of love.

But now there was a ringing at the door—Lady Cecil and Eva. In another moment they would be in the anteroom. Hastily Howard snatched the cloth from the table, and threw it over the dead body, which had been moved on to the sofa; then with one stride he was at the door, and, allowing his aunt to pass in, put his arm round Eva's waist, and drew her back.

'Dearest Eva, I will take you home,' he said. 'Trust me, aunt,' and with an expressive glance back at his aunt, and a hurried 'The Rector will want you,' he tried to hurry Eva down the marble steps again.

'But Dulcie?' pleaded Eva.

'Dulcie is ill. The doctor has been to her. He will come again.'

'It is fever; I am sure it is,' said Eva. 'Naples fever! Surely, Howard, you do not think I am afraid of fever? And mamma has gone in—mamma, who is so delicate.'

'Yes, yes, I know,' said Howard; 'but, Eva, to oblige *me*, will you come home? To oblige me, Eva!' Then as Eva hesitated, 'It is not fever. You could be no use. And, to oblige *me*, will you come home?'

'Oh yes, Howard; of course, if you ask in that way.'

The door had already been shut behind them. And the two young people went down the stairs together. Howard Jephson looked very grave and pale.

'What is it, Howard?' Eva asked at last, twining her little fingers into his caressingly.

'Don't ask me, Eva, for indeed I cannot tell you.'

This from Howard, the unimpressionable, the rational, mathematical, nineteenth century young man!

Lady Cecil and the Rector were a long time closeted together. The Rector told his story, showed the letter, and for once in her life Lady Cecil had nothing to say.

No father! no mother! no lover! no outlook! and only such a horrible past! Poor Dulcie, had she not better die?

CHAPTER XVIII.

DULCIE SPEAKING TO HER MOTHER.

'Could Time, his flight revers'd, restore the hours,
When playing with thy vesture's tissued flowers,
The violet, the pink, and jessamine,
I pricked them into paper with a pin,
And thou wast happier than myself the while;
Wouldst softly speak, and stroke my head and smile?'
Cowper.

IT was a long time before Dulcie showed any signs of convalescence. Lady Cecil, and Eva and Howard Jephson had gone on to Rome and Florence. They left hurriedly soon after Sir Ivor killed himself. Lady

Cecil was apprehensive lest Eva might hear something of the truth, and guess more, and she, like Howard, thought it all unfit for her daughter to hear.

'She will always have plenty of courage to face anything it is necessary for her to know. And, in this case, it could do no good,' said Lady Cecil.

'Oh! she has plenty of courage, and it could do no good,' said Howard, yet more decidedly.

Thus it is that elder people, and yet more men of a similar age, try to shield young girls from contact with the stern realities of life. An admirable method truly, if they can be quite sure they will always be there to play the part of a vicarious Providence, or to leave off doing so prudently, and with circumspection, but a

method that is truly fatal, when it is adhered to strictly one day, dropped suddenly the next! And which, in any case, may be expected to result in a certain want of consideration and levity on the part of the young girl, not trained as nature trains the briar roses, but rather like the hot-house flowers. Yet hot-house flowers are well in their place.

Thus Eva was hurried away from Naples, quite ignorant of all that had recently occurred, and slightly rebellious. Only once she was allowed to stand by Dulcie's bedside and take leave of her, which she did as of one dead, laying flowers on her breast, and by her side, as one lays flowers on a corpse. Dulcie was all unconscious, her eyes wide open, and bright with fever.

Then Lady Cecil and her party left

Naples. The St Germains were forced to remain. And it was only after some weeks that Dulcie was well enough to be moved. In the first instance, the doctors recommended moving her to comparatively breezy Sorrento. But the Rector noticed that even after that move, Dulcie gave no sign of returning interest in life. She sat very still on the terrace in front of their hotel, overlooking the Bay of Naples, and the Rector noticed she always looked seawards, away from Naples, shuddering if ever she caught sight of it, and looking up apprehensively, whenever she heard any one approaching. Did she possibly still live in fear of Sir Ivor? Were the doctors right, and was Dulcie unaware of his dreadful end? As to the letter from Australia, she had asked no question about it,

and he had never yet had courage to refer to it. But he felt it must be done. So with many warnings to Mrs St Germains to be prepared should Dulcie faint, or in any way break down, the good Rector took his courage in his hands with his Bible, and went to sit beside Dulcie on the terrace. First he read to her a chapter from St John, then he said,—'Dulcie, my dear, you know that Sir Ivor Montague is dead?'

Dulcie looked up. Had she been aware of it, or not? The Rector could not decide.

'And I am sorry, my dear, that, lonely as you are in the world, I cannot tell you of a loving father in Australia longing to receive you. But in that letter from Australia—which you never saw—your father, writing full of love to you, my dear, says your mother died years ago,—years

ago ; and that he is a dying man, and seems to expect he would be dead long before we got the letter.' Here Mr St Germains paused. But Dulcie never spoke. He then proceeded to read her certain passages from the letter, selecting them very carefully. Finally, he handed her the miniature,—' I think you will value this likeness of your mother. You are very like her, Dulcie.'

Dulcie took it and looked at it. ' Poor mother!' said she, and gazed very tenderly at the portrait. Mr St Germains grew hot all over, as he thought how often Sir Ivor might have pressed it to his lips, and where that portrait came from. But naturally Dulcie assumed that her father had sent it to her. However, it seemed the portrait recalled Sir Ivor to her, for

she said, after a moment or two,—'Sir Ivor died, you said?'

'Yes, yes, my dear, he is dead!'

'How did he die?' asked Dulcie, still holding the portrait of her mother in her hand, and gazing at it lovingly, yet never kissing it, nor showing much sign of emotion. Mr St Germains grew red again, and did not answer. Should he tell a lie? What was the best way of evading the question? Or should he, could he possibly tell her the truth?

Dulcie looked up surprised.

'He died very suddenly,' said Mr St Germains with an effort.

The sea splashed upon the shore below; some fisher boys were singing in a boat about the merry festa of Piedigrotta. A party of excursionists came out and looked

at the view on the terrace. They were Germans, and all wore plaids, and each in turn said, '*Wunder schön*,' the last man added, '*Himlisch!*' Then they sat down at a little table some way off, and a waiter brought them coffee.

'He did not kill himself?' asked Dulcie at last, speaking very stilly, only somewhat lower than commonly.

Mr St Germains stooped and picked up a little pebble. He stooped again and picked up another little pebble. But he did not speak.

'Did he kill himself?' asked Dulcie, leaning forward.

'Yes,' very low from Mr St Germains.

Dulcie leant back again.

'With a knife?' she asked at last.

'With a knife!'

'I remember,' said Dulcie. She looked very white, and her eyes gazed into the far distance as if seeing it all.

Mr St Germains trembled for her. He began reading aloud from the Gospel of St John again. Dulcie turned and listened; but, as he paused, she remarked eagerly,—

'He knew I would have married him?'

'Yes. He knew—he knew that,' said Mr St Germains.

Then Dulcie looked at her mother's picture.

'She looks so young and kind. How she would have pitied him!' said poor Dulcie. 'Perhaps my mother will comfort him for me up in heaven, and tell him—tell him I would have done all I could. Mother, will you do for him all I wanted to do? He was so miserable.

He could not find rest; not in God, nor in anyone, only in me, he said. Will you help him, mother, to find rest in God in heaven now, as I would have tried to do on earth. I think she will; don't you?' said Dulcie wistfully.

'Ye-es,' murmured the Rector, going nearer to telling a lie than he had ever done before in all the course of his life. But he was not sure whether Dulcie were not light-headed again, and excused himself afterwards on this ground.

'And so, my dear, you see we hope you will be with us for a long time to come, and very glad both Mrs St Germains and I are to think so.'

'Thank you!' said Dulcie, as if she were going to say more. 'Tha-ank you,' then paused.

CHAPTER XIX.

EVA CUT OFF FROM ALL HER BEST FRIENDS AS IF IN A CONVENT.

'O faire! O fortunate! O rich! O deare.'
O happy! and thrice happy shee,
Selected dove,
Whoe'er she bee,
Whose early love,
With winged vowes,
Makes hast to meet her morning spouse,
And close with his immortal kisses.'

Crashaw.

A YOUNG girl, with a very pale face, riding somewhat listlessly over hillsides covered with myrtles and asphodel; a typical English

clergyman, mounted on another pony in front, and a lady of blooming countenance, and somewhat unusually *recherchée* costume for an English lady on her travels! That is what the people at Sorrento saw. And many a German tourist bestirred himself to some deed of gallantry in hopes of winning a regard from the pale-faced English girl, and many an Italian, in difficulties about his glove bill, plucked furiously at his mustachioes, and thought now was his opportunity to repair the ruined fortunes of his family. It was, indeed, for Dulcie was a greater heiress even than he fancied, judging by the well-built figure and air of comfort of her supposed father, the Rector. Those Australian sheepruns were hers now. The wealth that Arthur Standert had sickened and died in acquir-

ing had all passed away to the young daughter, torn from his arms before he had even learnt to know her. And the angel of our workshop might now be called the great Australian heiress. But Mrs St Germains was the only one of the three who thought much about it. As for the Rector, he was only longing for some tinge of colour to come into Dulcie's cheeks, so that he might set off homewards again with a good conscience. He was hungering and thirsting for a sight of the flats of Lincolnshire. He felt supremely convinced that his *locum tenens* was ruffling everybody's sensibilities, that the school would not get as good a grant as usual, and even at times was disturbed by the idea, that the old people at the almshouses would be forgetting him, and that if he

stayed away too long he might receive a monition from the bishop.

And, meanwhile, the 'sweet story of old' was being told, and the pleasant play played out in London, the busy and the unfeeling. London, where people never meet except by intention, and then are still too much preoccupied by what they did last, and what they are going to do next, for more than a pressure of the hand, and a hasty *resumé* of the *Times*. No time to look into each other's lives, and read the heart-sickness there! Yet, even in London lovers read it too, sometimes in each other's eyes. But then for lovers for all time the clock stands still at whiles, galloping at others. Shakespeare has told us all about that, and we all know it too.

Howard Jephson had got to make his way, and his hands, or rather his head, might be supposed to be fully occupied with trying to do so. But crossing the Channel could not at once and for ever blot out all recollection of that time at Naples, nor efface the difference it had made in him. On the first Sunday after his return he went to one of those churches, chiefly affected by young men of his school, when they go to church at all, and he became at once conscious of the great difference between his physical appearance, and that of those his compeers he there encountered. How pale those other young men looked, how befogged, and unshone upon! Howard wondered whether he himself had ever looked so deficient in vitality. And the preacher's

sentences, which had been wont of old to sound to him so wisely tolerant, so indubitable in their way of pointing out that the one duty of life was Work! Work to the uttermost! without account of the motive that prompted, or the spirit that animated—matters these that might well be left to the consideration of dilettanti, men contemplative and utterly useless for all practical purposes—that same preacher's words now seemed to Howard but as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. He strayed away into an unknown church, little frequented, where the preacher had never been to college, and most evidently read a sermon not his own. And he felt as if he were left more undisturbed with God in that quiet little church, no scientific diction, no culture in fine coming between

him and worship, and arresting it at its outset.

Then such is the apparent inconsistency of human nature, this same Howard Jephson, who needed himself to pray now, and did not want only to hear other far-away people preached at; this same Howard felt also a capacity for enjoyment, such as is hardly indigenous in London. He went to balls, and met his cousin Eva. To that he did not object. What, however, he did object to was that he met her nowhere else. Eva was now under the charge of her two sisters, who had married well, and who wished to do their duty by their youngest sister. Between them she had not a moment free from entertainments of some sort. There seemed not a chance of getting five

minutes alone with her, except by cutting a dance out of the programme. For Howard would not go to Hurlingham, and he had no horse to ride in the Park.

'I liked Naples much better than London,' said Howard, having at last secured his cousin nominally for a waltz. Then added inconsequentially, 'You were a great deal more sensible there.'

'A girl in the London season is as much cut off from all intercourse with her friends as if she were in the severest convent ever invented,' said Eva piteously. 'You recollect Mrs Barrett Browning's poem, "Behind a Smile." It is worse than any convent grating, and yet we must all wear it.'

Howard looked at his little cousin with

surprise. She certainly did not look woe-begone.

'Girls like it, or they would not submit to it,' said he hotly. 'I am sure your mother—'

'Oh, she reads the *Nineteenth Century*,' said Eva, shaking her wise little head. 'And she gets long letters from Mr and Mrs St Germains, and never lets me see one of them. Dulcie never writes?' added Eva quickly, with a shy questioning little look up at him.

'Doesn't she?' said Howard gravely, looking down and reddening.

'What was it all? Do tell me,' whispered Eva.

'Not now, dear Eva,' said her cousin.

'When then?' pouted Eva.

'Never, unless you will give me the

opportunity of telling you any hour of the day, any day of the year?' said Howard, with sudden determination.

'I don't quite see how that is to be managed,' said Eva, suddenly ceasing to pout, and looking down, and growing sheepish.

'Don't you, Eva?' His tone was very grave, there was a tinge of sadness in it, and a sort of good-bye sound, as if then indeed it was all over.

Eva looked up quickly.

'Oh yes, I do, dear Howard. Of course I do, I quite see how it is to be managed. Only I have not the least idea what *it* is,' and there was her face all dimpling over with smiles, one little, white satin foot tapping upon the floor, and Eva once more herself again, all sauciness and rosy cheeks and

sparkling eyes. The heir to a coronet, for whom her sisters destined her, felt for the first time all they could have wished, and decided to offer at the next available opportunity. But Howard had been beforehand with him, and little Eva's marriage was not to be a worldly success like her sisters'.

Lady Cecil smiled when she was told.

'Eva will have to turn her dresses perhaps, and you wont be able to return dinners. But so much the better for young people who don't start with everything. If you only love Eva, Howard—'

'You may be quite sure I love her, aunt,' said the young man shyly. Then somewhat proudly, 'And though I have never been able to find out before, I am quite sure now she loves me.'

'I am sure of that,' said Lady Cecil,

smiling a little sadly. 'But that—that Dulcie! Poor girl! Are you quite sure—'

Howard's look of genuine distress stopped her.

'I look upon Dulcie as a saint, as an angel, if you will,' said the young man. 'She has taught me more of good than all the rest of the world put together. If I love Eva properly, if I love God, as I ought,' he spoke very reverently, 'it is thanks to Dulcie. In every bit of sin and sorrow I have come across she has been mixed up; and there's her life blighted as much as the life of anyone so pure and innocent can be blighted, and yet—and yet—whilst she has been lying at death's door—I cannot speak of her. Aunt, I cannot,' and Howard Jephson

suddenly broke down, covering his face with his hands. 'I meant to save her,' he went on again. 'I knew she dreaded that man; and I thought I would save her by my brains and by my pluck. And it has all come to this—this miserable ending. He killed himself with her in his arms, and it was I who told him who she was. I! and how little I thought what I was doing. Oh! when I think of it all now, I feel as if I never could have courage for anything again, never could face anything again without Eva to help me, Eva knowing nothing of all this guilt and misery. And you think, aunt, that it was Dulcie—'

'No, no! I know it was not,' said Lady Cecil, herself now greatly agitated, and bending forward to kiss him. 'Wait

and I will send Eva to you—Eva knowing nothing about it all.' And she went and called Eva, saying gently to her, —'Howard has told me all about it. And I am very glad and proud my little daughter should have won the love of a man than whom I have only known *one* more worthy love. Now go to Howard, dearest; he wants you. And I —I am tired.'

Meanwhile they were talking at Sorrento, on that terrace by the blue Mediterranean, Dulcie and the Rector and Mrs St Germains. And their talk was not of love and marriage, and they planned no radiant futures all to be made real shortly.

And all the while the dead man, who had loved so desperately, so darkly, lay

stiff and cold in his grave. And Phyllis Lyndsay, hardly older than the daughter she had so loved and mourned, perchance saw it all; and Arthur Standert knew all also, as we believe the dead know thoroughly, not as we in life imperfectly. And if they knew all, and with what a terrible love the dead man had loved and longed, doubtless they forgave their own lives darkened and cut short, and their child's life shadowed.

But was it really shadowed? The good Rector began to believe not. Yet it cost the good man a struggle. Dulcie's ideas were so alien from all the St Germain tenets.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE WORLD, NOT OF THE WORLD.

'How spake the oracle? Care for no name at all!
Say but just this: We praise one helpful whom we call
The holder of the ploughshare. The great deed ne'er grows small.'—*Browning.*

A LARGE brick house, of a plain old Queen Anne style; a square grass plot, shut round with evergreens in front; behind, a wide, comfortable garden. To the left tall elm trees; to the right a well-stocked kitchen

garden. Several such are to be seen in Essex, not so very far from London; and to such a house as this the wealth of the man who had left England, and friends, and family alone, with his young wife, to seek the means of livelihood in Australia, had ultimately flowed.

Dulcie as a young nursing mother—a sweet elder sister amongst the waifs and strays of humanity—in a comfortable home-like English house, that yet only by courtesy was called a Home, was no one's home in reality, not even hers, to whom it all belonged, seemed Dulcie in her native element, in her fitting place, such as she never could have been, had she married into some comfortable English family, and sought to establish for herself a home life, such

as she had never known, nor had any part in.

She had planned it all, and the good Rector only helped her to realise her plans. And even Mrs St Germains was satisfied when she saw Dulcie had cocks and hens, and even cows, and everything as it should be; had everything been different, and this really her home,—hers, who could never have a home. And Howard and Eva were satisfied when they brought their baby there, and saw Dulcie's satisfaction in it, and noted how her face shone, and how all around loved her, and gained fresh life from her love.

Howard had been satisfied from the first that it was all right. Only little Eva had had her doubts. But after that first visit with her baby—the joy of her

eyes, and the pride of her heart—Eva felt quite satisfied. And it was not long afterwards before she was saying,—

'I think Dulcie is the happiest person I know; really the happiest,' saying it with great fervour, and as if after much thought and careful consideration she had deliberately come to this conclusion.

Her husband said nothing then. But years afterwards he told her the whole story. Then her eyes opened wide with horror, as they had been used to do, when she was barely more than a child at Naples, and her cheeks grew pale.

'Oh! Howard, how good you were not to tell me then, when I did not yet know how very, very good it is possible for a man to be,' and she threw her arms round him, and hugged him.

'Oh, poor, poor Dulcie! How glad I am she has made a life for herself, and found such happiness making others happy. But, Howard, how could you let me wear that necklet of pearls that bad man gave Dulcie—on our wedding-day, too?'

'I liked you to wear it,' said Howard gravely. 'Dulcie tried to teach me long ago never to think so hardly as I used to do of people who are—*not* good. And I wished to be quite sure I had learnt my lesson, and remembered it on our wedding-day, in my great happiness. Sir Ivor suffered very terribly. And the man who loved Dulcie, and Dulcie's mother, cannot have been all bad, though he carried that love to madness. Dulcie's mother had some happiness in her life. Dulcie herself is happy. Her father!—

ask to see that torn Australian letter, nor know how it had come about that the terrible destiny of becoming Sir Ivor's wife had been averted from her.

For years Mr St Germans dreaded that some day she would; but by degrees he began to realise how entirely, not of the world, though in the world was Dulcie's life. And the good man was a better man for ever afterwards when he once realised it. It set his tongue free also.

And thus as years passed on, the good Rector never scrupled to tell his friends of the darkest tragedy with which his spiritual ministrations had ever brought him in contact.

THE END.

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